

Recollections of Catoctin Parish

Protestant Episcopal Church



St. Stephen's Chapel

Thurmont, Md.

Harriet Chapel

Catoctin, Md.



FOREWORD

The author of these recollections, Miss Louise McPherson, is a devoted member of Catoctin Parish. She has done an excellent job and I recommend this booklet to all members of Catoctin Parish, former members and friends, and to all who live in the Catoctin-Thurmont area. There are many interesting side-lights on the history of the community as well as the parish.

For this interesting history we shall always be indebted to "Miss Louise," and one can readily see from it that Catoctin Parish has known dark days as well as bright, but such is always the case. Yet the future of Catoctin Parish looks very bright. Increased interest has brought about improvements and increased activities. The newly established Sunday School at St. Stephen's and the large one at Harriet Chapel promise a good future and the Parish Home at Harriet, now being built, will offer the means by which we may serve our people and the community to a fuller extent than before. God has blessed us in our work and I ask you to pray constantly that He will continue to bless us and reveal His will for us as we seek to fulfill our commission to spread His Kingdom.

BERNARD A. JENNINGS,
Rector, Catoctin Parish

CATOCTIN PARISH

The village of Catoctin Furnace, Maryland, nestles in the valley at the base of the mountain of the same name.

Before the Revolution in 1770, seven thousand acres of land hereabouts were granted to Leonard Calvert, Thomas Johnson and Launcelot Jacques who were interested in developing the iron ore in this region.

A furnace was erected, a dozen or so houses of logs or stone were built along the turnpike for the workers, and great flat open spaces were made on the mountain side where the fine old trees were burned into charcoal, which was hauled down by four mule teams to fire the hearths of the furnace and turn the ore into "pig-iron."

When the Revolution came, cannon, shot and shell for General Washington's army at Yorktown were made here; later castings for Rumsey's experimental steamboat were fashioned under his direction.

At that time the main buildings were located on Featherbed Lane, and a large imperfect casting intended for the ship stood for many years imbedded near the cross-roads.

In the war between the states, the plates of the Monitor, which fought the Merrimac at Hampton Roads, were made from iron produced at Catoctin Furnace.

Changes came — Launcelot Jacques withdrew to his own furnace across the mountain, and the four Johnson brothers, Thomas, Roger, James and Baker, became the owners here in 1793.

Catoctin House, now a pitiful ruin staring down the road with vacant eyes through the encroaching trees, was built as a home for the superintendent of the furnace, which was growing in importance.

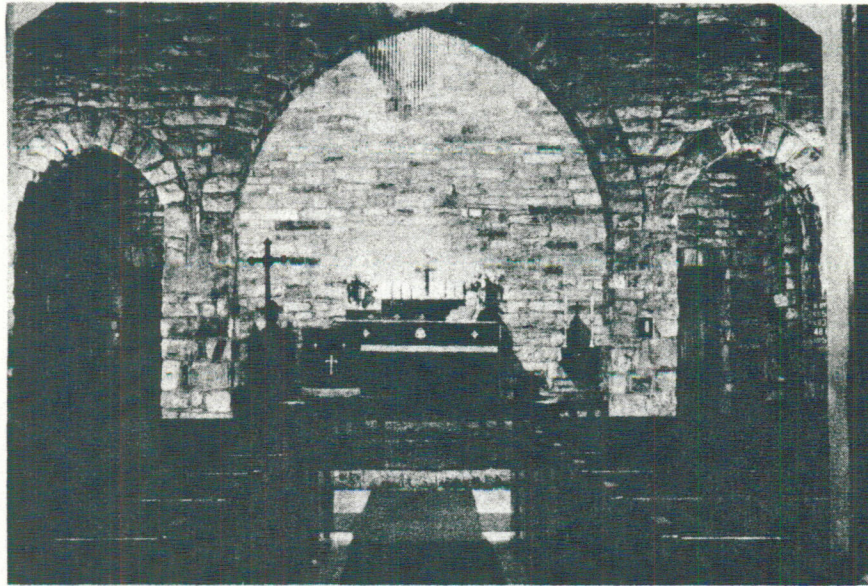
More changes — Thomas Johnson entered politics and became Governor of Maryland. Baker took over the business in 1803 and in 1805 began the building of the house at Auburn Farm where he lived for some years.

At the foot of the rise on which Auburn is built, there was a pond fed by a stream coming from a spring at the furnace.

Near the gateway to the drive stood a forge where castings were made, the bellows being driven by the water from the pond.

There were two log houses across the road where the men lived who worked at the forge, one is still standing and in use.

When the state road was widened a few years ago, several cannon balls were plowed out of the old site, as well as iron wedges used to direct the flow of molten iron when it was run off in the casting house to make the little "pigs" which were later shipped to market.



INTERIOR OF HARRIET CHAPEL

On the left of the driveway, near the gate, a warehouse for charcoal stood for many years; the soil is still blacker here than further up the hill.

When Dr. McPherson bought Auburn in 1848, the eastern limit of the property was drawn to exclude the stream, the pond, and the forge site, and no provision was made for water rights.

Years later during the proprietorship of the Kunkels, after the forge had been moved, the water was diverted at the furnace and the pretty little pond became a grove of locust trees. In fact, it was not until after the furnace property passed into the hands of Mr. Jacques and Mr. Hauver in 1923 that Auburn owned its own gateway.

The pond site, the warehouse plot, and the land between was purchased from them in 1924.

When Baker Johnson took over the control of the property in 1793, the furnace was run by two men, Blackford and Thornburgh, who came from Great Britain. A number of Hessian soldiers who fought through the Revolution settled in the village, where their descendants still live, and the work expanded.

About 1820 the property was bought by the superintendent, John Brien, and his brother-in-law, John McPherson.

They cast the ten plate stoves, which burned full-length cord wood, and the Franklin stoves made to fit into fireplaces, some of which are still preserved with the inscription "McPherson and Brien, Catoctin Furnace."

Mrs. John Brien was Harriet, the only daughter of Colonel John McPherson of Prospect Hall near Frederick and had all her life attended All Saints' Church in that city.

After coming to Catoctin House to live, she must have found it very difficult to reach her church; a round trip of twenty-four miles is a long drive even with good horses.

Her winters, however, were mostly spent in Frederick where her father had built two houses on Court Square, one for her and one for himself.

Harriet McPherson Brien died in 1827 at the age of forty-seven, leaving several sons.

In the records of All Saints' Parish, the following entry is made:

"Consecration of a Church. October 25th, 1833, Bishop Stone consecrated to the service of God Harriet Chapel, a church edifice erected by John Brien, Sr., at his works called Catoctin.

"The name of the chapel was a token of respect to Mr. Brien who deeded the church to the Rt. Rev. Wm. M. Stone in trust for the Diocese."

This record was found last summer and settles the origin and name of our chapel, which had been confused by the inscription on the old red Bible still in use — a gold "Harriot."

Undoubtedly our Grandmother could have told us all about it. She was another Harriet McPherson and for fifty years during her life at Auburn was the soul of the parish.

She it was who pursued the idea of having an Episcopal Church in Thurmont and she wrote to family and friends all over the country, raising her share of the money for the building and obtaining memorials to beautify it.

It is a pity that while we are young we so seldom inquire into the interests of our elders, church and family affairs especially.

All Saints' Parish in the early days took in a large tract of land and in one of the histories of the county there is recorded a vestry meeting in 1834 at which the Reverend Henry Johns announced that the parsonage had been finished at Catoctin Furnace and a missionary engaged to officiate at the chapel.

Plans were also made for special services for the negroes who were either slaves or employed in the neighborhood.

Being a mission of All Saints' Parish, Harriet Chapel was for some years supplied by clergy who came out from Frederick and later a succession of rectors followed.

After some years, the furnace again changed hands. Peregrine Fitzhugh was the new owner, and his wife Margaret chose to live at Catoctin House because it was nearer her husband's business and the church, and in 1848 Auburn Farm was sold to their cousin, Dr. William S. McPherson.

In 1855 the Fitzhughs decided to go to California with their bevy of lovely daughters and one son, but before disposing of the furnace property, they deeded to the Diocese of Maryland the seven acres of land around the church, with the rectory and all other buildings on it — surely a generous gift.

During the War between the States, the furnace continued to operate, and the men to have work, though many went off to fight for the Blue or the Gray.

The Union Army marched through the village on the way to Gettysburg and for days after the battle, poor tired boys from both sides wandered back through the country side and were fed and cheered by kindly folk wherever they stopped. At Auburn a barrel of flour was made into biscuits and apple turn-overs in three days.

After the War, the furnace was owned and operated by two brothers, Jacob and John Kunkel. They lived at Catoctin House and the company store was built from the pike to their front gate, facing what is now called Brewster's Road, where it stood for many years.

The Kunkels added hundreds of acres to their holdings during their ownership of the property and were among the most successful managers of the furnace.

In 1866 John B. Kunkel became sole owner until his death in 1885 and, during his ownership, a third hearth was built; he increased the acreage to eleven thousand acres, and employed over four hundred men.

Meantime Harriet Chapel continued to hold services, to baptize new citizens, to bury the dead and to keep the Sunday School going even during the occasional lapses between rectors — for they were only human and the rigorous life in what was then a small and rather remote community with no advantages for their families, and a very small stipend, often made them eager for a change.

On leaving Harriet Chapel, one rector, Father Curtis, made a change which altered his whole life. He entered the Roman Catholic Church and later became a Bishop and so well-known that many years later a group of priests from Mt. St. Mary's came over to see the little church where Bishop Curtis had his first pastorate.

In 1889 when the Johnstown Flood brought disaster to our neighbors in Pennsylvania, Little Hunting Creek at the edge of the village rose so high as to flood the lower floor of the rectory, and the Rev. Mr. Whittingham, then rector, was obliged to stay on the second floor until the water subsided, leaving the spring in the church yard where it has been ever since, a reminder of a tragic catastrophe.

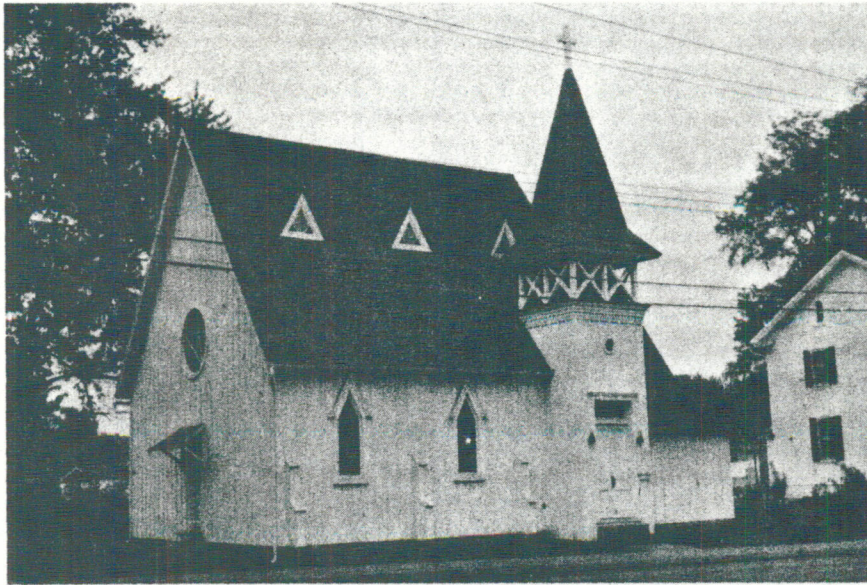
Time passed on, the furnace still operated, the church still ministered to the neighborhood, and a new industry arose — a paint mill — which stood about half a mile north of Catoclin.

More houses were built along the pike and, since the workers who lived there were employed either in the ore mines or the clay deposits from which the paint was made, the settlement was called the "Mine Bank." The clay for the paint was brought to the mill in small flat cars which ran by gravity on a narrow-gauge track — an exciting ride for a child allowed to take it!

To go back a bit: In the 1880's a young clergyman came to Harriet Chapel, the Rev. Ernest McGill. After a year or so, he and Mary Buchanan McPherson, of Auburn, were married and went out to Blair, Nebraska, where a priest was needed.

Mrs. McGill's aunt, Meliora McPherson, was the wife of Bishop Clarkson, the first Bishop of that far western diocese.

After a year in Nebraska, Mr. McGill and his family returned to the east. There were several calls during the years — to Key West, to Jacksonville, to Sparrow's Point.



ST. STEPHEN'S, THURMONT, MD.

Those were the days when many summer boarders came to Thurmont and the neighborhood.

There were no trolleys, no bus, and Harriet Chapel seemed far away. So the Episcopalians felt there should be a church in town for themselves and the summer colony. Generous friends all over the country contributed as well as those close at hand, and St. Stephen's was built in 1892.

It is a lovely little church. Almost all the fittings are memorials, and the four stained glass windows are most pleasing.

In 1896 the Rev. Ernest McGill was returned by the Bishop to Catoclin Parish, where he remained until his death ten years later. The charge was not an easy one. He ministered to three mission Churches — St. John's in Walkersville, St. Stephen's in Thurmont, and Harriet Chapel at Catoclin.

Those were horse and buggy days and the parson's gig was on the road most of every Sunday through cold and heat.

Mr. McGill and his family lived at Auburn, the rectory being rented, and during this time part of the north wing of Auburn was destroyed by fire, including the rector's study and all the Church records — an irrevocable loss.

The work of the furnace was slowing down. Other plants had been established nearer the great industrial centers where transportation was less a problem and costs were lower.

The paint mill had closed. Many of the village men found work on the Western Maryland Railroad. They would leave early Monday morning with huge baskets of cooked food and come home Saturday for a rest and a refill.

The worst tragedy which ever came to the community occurred in June 1905. A flat car loaded with workers was being hauled up the line and, through a mistake in signals, a fast train crashed into it. There was hardly a family untouched — fathers, brothers, sons, the breadwinners were gone. The rector with others worked night and day to comfort the distressed and bury the dead.

The following year the charge was left vacant by the sudden death of Mr. McGill, and the years ahead were trying ones for Catoclin Parish. Clergymen came and went, sometimes living at the rectory, sometimes with the household at Auburn.

Bishop Paret, much loved, was growing old and feeble. The rule of retiring our bishops at the age of seventy-two was not passed by the Convention until years later.

About 1908 Archdeacon Murray was sent to the outlying missions of the diocese to report their condition to the Bishop.

At Walkersville he found the congregation had mostly moved away. At Harriet Chapel only a remnant remained. St. Stephen's seemed the liveliest church among the three.

Therefore, the few vestrymen who met with the Archdeacon voted to sell the church in Walkersville — it has ever since been a warehouse! To sell the rectory and all buildings and land of the Fitzhugh gift to the diocese, save a small margin of ground around the church, and with the proceeds to build a rectory in Thurmont, which was done to the detriment of the work at Harriet Chapel.

Again the furnace was sold. This time to a Pennsylvanian, a Mr. Thropp, who closed it completely, moving all the machinery to his own plant near Pittsburgh.

There were twenty or thirty houses in the village street or scattered over the property and a caretaker was left at Catocin House to look after the rentals and repairs.

Harriet Chapel was supplied from Thurmont for some years and in the gap between rectors the devoted members of the congregation kept the Sunday School going.

From its beginning before the Revolution, Catocin Furnace has been an industrial town, though in one of the foremost farming counties in the country.

In 1915 a firm from Pennsylvania started a stave mill here using some of the buildings near the trolley station, which have since been torn down, and building others to house machinery.

Timber was bought within a radius of miles and the finished staves were shipped back to be made into barrels for cement.

During World War I, five sawmills were cutting along the mountain and the barrels traveled overseas as fast as the troops. It was the largest operation in timber in the state. This project gave employment to many of the men in the village at a time when it was sorely needed.

When the work at the furnace finally slackened and died, the men turned to the railroad, to the mountain for cord wood and lumber, to the quarry, to the state road.

Nowadays in the village there is an abattoir and a rendering plant, besides the general store, but Thurmont has many places of employment for both men and women — a shoe factory, a printing establishment, a cannery, a sewing factory, building contractors of various kinds, and there are the state roads and the many openings in Frederick just twelve miles away.

A railroad from Frederick to Thurmont had been built in 1907 mainly to carry the output of the furnace, but later it became a trolley which was crowded morning and night with workers. This passenger service was discontinued in 1954, but a bus was substituted between the two towns.

About 1918 the parish was again without a rector. A devout Scotsman, Mr. Crawford, the head of the Ox Fibre Brush plant in Frederick, was also a lay-reader and began to come out to Harriet Chapel each Sunday with one of his lieutenants, Mr. Paisley. Morning prayer was said, and the Sunday School kept going.

Some of the youngsters of that time, now staid grandparents, used to run a quarter of a mile down the road to be brought back in one of Mr. Crawford's big cars. Automobiles were not so plentiful then as now and the children loved the short ride in either his Cadillac or his Packard.

During Mr. Crawford's charge, a new floor was laid in the church and the white walls were kalsomined a soft grey.

A few years later, Mr. Crawford resigned his position, studied for Holy Orders and after his ordination he had a parish in Rhode Island until his death.

In 1921 Bishop Murray called the Rev. Warren K. Damuth from New York, where for ten years he had been rector of a church near Washington Square.

Father Damuth was a native of Thurmont, where his relatives still lived, and Catoctin Parish was in his charge until his death in 1948.

In 1923 the furnace property was sold on a mortgage to Launcelot Jacques, a descendant of the first owner, and his partner, Stanley Hauver. Catoctin House, all the village, ten thousand six hundred acres of land and the ruins of the furnace comprised the lot.

The tenants of the houses on the property were given the opportunity to buy their homes and in many of them the third and fourth generations are still living today.

While livestock was still allowed to browse along the roadside, the dooryards of the houses in the street had picket fences, which along with the houses were white-washed each spring and made a snowy background for the hollyhocks and roses and day lilies which abounded.

Horses are almost extinct in these days of the motor, and cows are corralled. So the fences have mostly gone and many of the log houses are covered with siding and painted, but still the little street is unique, and many a tourist stops to snap his camera at the old chimneys and the flowery dooryards.

Later some of the furnace acreage was sold, one part to Laurence Richey, President Hoover's secretary, and a camp was built on the brook side—including a cabin for the President. He, however, disliked the publicity which was given his visits and the country road which had followed Hunting Creek for a century could not be closed as he wished, so he withdrew to Rapidan, near Madison, Virginia, and took his outings there.

In the early 1930's the government bought 5,000 acres of this mountain land, and Catoctin House, for the National Park system in which President Roosevelt was much interested.

These were the years of the depression, and developing this tract gave work to many who otherwise would have been unemployed, a tragic word in many a family.

The beautiful boxwood which lined the walk at Catoctin House was removed to Washington, some of it used at the White House, some at the Lincoln Memorial. The old house itself was found in such bad repair that nothing was done to preserve it from ruin.

Sites on the mountain were chosen for three camps, cabins and dining halls were built among the trees, also recreation grounds and swimming pools, all simple but complete and substantial.

One of these camps, Green Top, cares for nearly a hundred crippled children each summer. Another has been used at times by the Salvation Army and the Girl Scouts.

The third at the mountain top was built for government employees and friends who for a nominal fee could come out for a cool weekend of rest and recreation.

During the War when President Roosevelt could no longer cruise in safety on the sea he loved, this camp was turned into a retreat for him. He named it Shangri-la, a secret place in the mountains where soul and body could be refreshed. President Eisenhower, who uses the camp frequently, changed the name to Camp David. Many of the great of the world have spent weekends there and important decisions have been made.

The towns-folk and the newsmen kept their promise and no mention of Shangri-la was ever made until the war was nearly over, when a woman reporter visiting nearby sent the story to her paper and somehow it got by the censor. Luckily no harm was done by that time in telling the well-kept secret.

The last of the buildings standing at the furnace site was the stone casting shed and the owners offered it to Harriet Chapel if the vestry would have it torn down. So in 1925 during the rectorship of Father Damuth, the little timber chancel and sacristy were supplanted by a beautiful stone sanctuary with three arches, and a large room used for Sunday School, as well as a room which was added for the heating plant.

The pot-bellied stove disappeared. The walls blushed a soft peach color and handsome side lights, a gift from St. John's Lutheran Church in Thurmont, took the place of the inadequate lights used so long.

During this time the largest confirmation class ever assembled at Harriet Chapel, twenty-seven, was presented to the Bishop.

In 1948 Father Damuth died, and in a few months the Rev. Oscar F. R. Treder, D.D., was called to the parish. Dr. Treder had been for some years the Dean of the Cathedral of the Incarnation at Garden City, Long Island, and later an assistant at the Cathedral in Harrisburg, Pa. While here, Dr. Treder ministered to St. Stephen's, Harriet Chapel, and the State Sanatorium at Sabillasville where he spent one day a week, and one evening broadcasting through the hospital network to the patients, many of them unable to leave their beds.

During his rectorship the Church School at Harriet Chapel grew in numbers, a new organ was installed and a vestibule built to break the wintry winds which chilled the church whenever the outer door was opened.

An oil heating plant was put in at St. Stephen's and other improvements made there and at the rectory.

Dr. Treder was along in years and far from well during most of his charge here, but will not soon be forgotten, especially by his friends at the sanatorium.

The fall after his death in 1952, the present rector, the Rev. Bernard A. Jennings came to take over the duties of the parish as well as ministering to St. Ann's Church in Smithsburg where he makes his home. Mr. Jennings had been Assistant Rector at the Church of the Messiah, Baltimore.

At Catoctin Parish the new rector found a group of parishioners who loved their church and were eager to work for it.

In the spring the men laid a new floor at Harriet Chapel, repaired the plaster and window-sills and redecorated the walls. The women polished the brass light fixtures and thoroughly cleaned the church, even the stone walls of the sanctuary. New oak pews have been put in to replace the old ones which were built with no reference to the human anatomy. These were paid for through memorial gifts and a plaque has been placed in the church with the names of those memorialized. One of the vestrymen made a handsome walnut credence table with a shelf for the beautiful brass alms basins, also a memorial gift.

The vestibule, which was built of cement blocks, has been faced with stone to match the church and a stone platform has been built at the entrance, the work being the gift of another vestryman. The huge flat stone over which the feet of the faithful have trod for more than a century is placed at the edge of the platform, still the first step up towards the worship of God.

St. Stephen's also has had many improvements, the work being done mostly by the men of the parish from both churches. The building has been painted outside and in, the plaster repaired, the sanctuary enlarged, new carpet laid and the Bishop's chair refinished. The vestry room has been

improved with a new rug and draperies and a chest of drawers for storage. A new organ was just recently purchased. The stained glass windows were repaired and braced in January 1955.

All these things seem material — but they are "outward and visible signs" of love for our Lord and the work he expects us to do.

The Church Schools are growing in both communities (St. Stephen's Church School was begun in 1954) and there is always a class to be confirmed when the Bishop makes his annual visitation, which in 1957 was at both churches in September.

The Vestry meets the first Monday evening of each month and the Woman's Auxiliary and the Altar Guild, both started under the present rector, are working smoothly and efficiently. The Auxiliary meets the second Wednesday of each month in the homes and an excellent program is carried out in study and service.

There are two lay readers in the parish who help in emergencies and a small vested choir at Harriet Chapel.

The next project is to complete the Parish House at Catoctin, which will be for the use of the community as well as both churches and prove a center for all sorts of activities. About one-half the fund has been raised by memorial gifts. The plans for the Parish House were a gift from the Church of the Annunciation of Anna Maria, Florida, and were revised by Mr. James J. Chapman, Jr., Diocesan Architect for this area, and the vestry authorized the immediate building of the structure. It forms an ell with Harriet Chapel and has a lovely cloister facing the church yard. The building will later be faced with native stone in keeping with the church and contain an assembly room, sacristy, kitchen, and rest rooms. Indeed this will be a very useful and needed addition as well as a beautiful one.

At this writing, the assembly room is being used for the Church School and meetings, and the kitchen will be completed as soon as possible.

Before long, Bishop Powell will come to bless the building for the use of the Parish and the community.

So far almost all of the work has been done by the men of the parish. Only \$280.00 has been spent on labor and this was for additional masons to hurry the block work. This is indeed a tribute to the men of Catoctin Parish! The Parish House will be a monument to their devotion and loyalty.

Truly if the founders of Catoctin Parish can know of the opportunities for service which lie ahead, it must be a cause of rejoicing that so many are turning to the "Faith once delivered to the saints" and letting their "light so shine before men that they may see their good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven."

By LOUISE McPHERSON

