

# Fairfield Presbyterian's Fairton Meeting House, 1850-Present

For most congregations, a meeting house erected in 1850 would be considered a cherished historical site. Indeed, the present congregation is grateful and proud to worship in such a time honored sanctuary, but this is the congregation's fourth meeting place. With the venerable third meeting house—the Old Stone Church—two miles down the road, the historical sense of the current church building is often taken for granted.

Prompted by the Old School – New School controversy in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the shift in the community center to Fairton proper, the need for a new meeting place was pressing. Lawrence Roff records the steps of the move to Fairton after the split in the church in 1838.

Following Ethan Osborn's retirement in 1844, the Old Stone Church commenced a search for a new minister. On November 19, 1845, an installation service for Rev. Beriah B. Hotchkin was held. He was to serve both the Fairfield Church and the Second Church of Cedarville. He resided part of the time in Cedarville and part of the time in Fairton. The mother church did not experience anything like the growth and revival under Osborn's ministry. Regular worship and discipline were maintained, but no outstanding seasons were reported. "An unpleasantness and want of harmony in the session the pastor regarded as a hindrance to spiritual growth."<sup>132</sup>

With such great reductions in membership as had occurred from 1838 and with the focus of the community centering more and more in Fairton, discussions were renewed regarding the relocation of worship there. A preliminary meeting was held in December, 1846. No decision was reached and the matter was resigned to private contemplation for the next year and a half. On March 16, 1848, the church officially decided, by a vote of ten to two, to commit themselves to relocating in Fairton.<sup>133</sup> Donations were to be solicited to cover the cost of the new building. On April 5, 1849, having received donations amounting to \$1687, the congregation set their plans in motion.

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Note: footnote numbers are the same as found in the Lawrence Roff book *The Fairfield Presbyterians, Puritanism in West Jersey from 1680*.

<sup>132</sup> Anderson, "History of the Old Stone Church" in Bicentennial Celebration, pp. 92-93.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

"Resolved, that the meeting proceed to appoint a building committee and that said committee proceed as soon as possible to the erection of a church edifice in Fairton with such means as are now subscribed together with such additional subscriptions as they may be able to obtain.

"Resolved, that the building committee should consist of two. The following persons were chosen. Viz - John Trenchard and Theo. E. Harris.

"Resolved, that the following instructions be given to the building committee.

1st To build the church as near the centre of the village as they can obtain ground.

2nd That they should have an end gallery in said church.

3rd That there should be no vestibule."<sup>134</sup>

A lot was contributed by John Trenchard. He and Theophilus Harris, the building committee, reported on March 29, 1850, that the building had been completed. Total cost had been approximately \$2500. At the final service in the Old Stone Church, Osborn preached. In April, worship was transferred to Fairton and pews were rented. (*The Fairfield Presbyterians, Puritanism in West Jersey*, Pgs. 34-35, Lawrence C. Roff)



The fourth Fairfield Church Building, built in 1850, shown here in 1906

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<sup>134</sup> Trustee Records.