"TURNING BACK THE TOWN CLOCK"

Some Interesting Facts About Our Community During Almost Two-Hundred And Fifty Years

Depicting The Stories Of An Era And Of Two Closely Connected Landmarks

written by **W. HOWARD CAREY**

with THANKS to

Rev. Ed Martin, Priscilla Wilkinson, William B. Wagamon, Jr., Charles G. Jones, Jr., Millard Jenkins, and the entire committee for restoring the Parish House

OCTOBER 1973

HUMBLY DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF
DAD'S AND MOTHER'S GENERATION

The St. John The Baptist Church Building as it stands today, was originally built in 1877, and completely remodeled in 1936. The Parish Hall at the rear of the main building was completed and dedicated on Monday evening, October 6, 1941. The Cross at the peak of the church roof was made and erected by Henry C. Wagamon.

The dwelling, built by the late George B. Atkins, was recently purchased by the Church for use as a Sunday School Room and Meeting Place.

The Replica Of The Church Altar Made From Timbers Of The Mill Building.

The Altar In The Main Church Building and The Beautiful Stained Glass Window.

TURNING BACK THE TOWN CLOCK
The End of a Memorable Era of our Community's History
* * * * * *

Our Town has never had what could be termed a "Town Clock," located in the center of a Square, or one to be heard striking away the time in quarters, halves and hours. The nearest thing to a real town clock has been the now antiquated timepiece which could, and still can be observed by glancing through the window of the Welch Drug Store when traveling North on Union Street. This one has been in the same location for as long as this writer can remember. Now, of course, the local Bank has a modern electronic clock and temperature guage which can be seen from all angles in the center of downtown Milton. Therefore, our "clock" to be turned back will have to be an imaginary one, and that will be the only fanciful thing about this story, the rest being Historical facts.

Our story deals mainly with two of Milton's Landmarks -- The St. John The Baptist Episcopal Church and The Diamond State Roller Mills. The latter having recently been razed by fire in a well planned destruction maneuver by our local volunteer firemen, assisted by other firemen from Georgetown, Lewes, Rehoboth Beach and Ellendale. The original building, housing the Mill, was destroyed in a fire that was not planned. This burned the night of August 4, 1943.

In the flames of the more recent burning, this writer could "see" many memories; some of these being brought to mind by having actually seen them happening throughout the years, and others produced by research of history and of listening to the older residents of the community. This seemed to be the final chapter of an era in our town, and therefore, the perfect place to stop our imaginary clock for a brief period -- just long enough to turn it back to a beginning some 245 years ago, when, according to history, the construction of the first Saint John The Baptist P. E. Church was begun in "The Wilderness" of Sussex County.

It was the Reverend William Becket, the Church of England Missionary in charge of Sussex County, who led the construction of a Church Building, beginning on March 27, 1728. The building of this church took about six months to complete, for the Reverend Becket stated in a letter dated September 25, 1729, that "My Churches are in a growing condition, and a fourth church, built in a forest was opened by me about a year ago, by the name of St. John The Baptist." He further stated in this letter that, "There is likely to be a numerous

congregation there." (Note: Frank Zebley, author of "The Churches Of Delaware," believes that this quotation accounts for the famous and yet mysterious "Forest Church.") In his last letter dated September 26, 1742, Reverend Becket wrote, "My four churches are filled on Sundays, and I am obliged to preach under the trees."

Located about two and one-half miles Southwest of Milton, the Church Building was erected at "the fording place" of Long Bridge Branch, in the forest of Broadkiln where the road crossed that stream, and which was then the main throughfare leading to the lower part of Sussex County Delaware and into Maryland. It was located on the East side of the pond, between the residence of H. S. Marshall and the Schoolhouse. The framework was of white oak, and the dimensions being twenty feet by thirty feet, by twelve feet high -- approximately the size of today's two-car garage. The roof was of cypress shingles, and the sides were sheathed with cypress boards.

Governor James Ponder, a Milton resident, possessed a receipt for twenty shillings, dated March 15, 1731, and given to Mr. John Ponder, the Governor's great-grandfather, "for his subscription to the Church of St. John The Baptist, by me, (signed) Joseph Harrison."

Under the Charge of St. Peter's Episcopal Church at Lewes, the building was used as a place of worship until about 1800. It was then used as a schoolhouse for many years. No above-the-ground evidence of this church building appears today. Some local history buffs are now interested in organizing for excavation at the area, in search of sub-surface evidence.

The families of Ponder, Pettyjohn and Paramore (now Palmer -- Note: J. Thomas Scharf's History of Delaware, Vol. II), were all connected with the church. George Calhoun once related that in his early days he attended preaching in the house and in 1800 he Headed school there.

The Reverend Cory Chambers reported that he helped revive the Milton congregation in July, 1838. Occasional services were held in the Methodist Episcopal and the Methodist Protestant Churches of Milford, as well as in the "Forest Church." On May 20, 1847, Bishop Alfred Lee preached at one of these meetings. In 1864 the Reverend J. Leighton McKim, of Milford, began to hold services in the Methodist Protestant Church. A Parish was organized and given the name, "St. Mary's," as this was believed to have been the name of the Church in the Wilderness. It was finally determined in 1875, that the correct name was, "St. John The Baptist."

The present Church Building, located on the Northeast corner of Federal and Prettyman streets in Milton, on land purchased by William V. Coulter, was raised with the expectation of completion by October 1, 1875. The Consecration Service was held on June 5, 1877, by the Right Reverend Alfred Lee and the Reverend McKim. During his pastorate, Dr. McKim would often be known to walk to-and-fro between Milford and Milton in the performance of his ministry. This "New" Church Building, a one-story frame structure, thirty feet by fifty-six feet, was built at a cost of twenty-five hundred dollars. It was reportedly fashioned after an inverted sailing ship's hull, in keeping with Milton's shipbuilding heritage.

During the late 1800's no regular Vicar was stationed here; the pulpit was supplied by clergymen from Milford, Georgetown and Lewes. In the years 1907 and 1908, a Mission was conducted in Ellendale.

Our "Clock" has now advanced to the early 1900's, and it is at this point that we turn to our second landmark of this story, The Diamond State Roller Mills. For, it was in the year 1900 that three members of the Wagamon family, Hamilton K. (Kurt), John T. and Daniel (Dan) W., Sr., purchased a Sawmill and Gristmill from the estate of the late Governor Samuel Paynter. This establishment, whose locations were at what is now Federal and Sand Streets, and at the "Sawmill Pond" (now Draper's Pond), and a third location where the Mill recently stood. The name and Trademark, "The Diamond State Roller Mills," was adopted in 1901. In 1910, Henry (Harry) C. Wagamon purchased a one-half interest in the business, and in 1917 William B. Wagamon, Sr., became a partner. The Mill specialized in the manufacture of fine flour. This writer, while watching the flames of the burning buildings, could well imagine those "red, white and blue flour sacks" on the shelves of the store of D. Wagamon & Son -- the same Daniel W. Wagamon who had helped start the Diamond State Roller Mills. This store was located on the corner of Chestnut and Wharton Streets, and has since been demolished. A section of the Wagamon home located in back of the store, on Wharton Street, is now a historical landmark located in Lewes as a part of Delaware's History.

As the flames roared through the main building, one could "see" C. B. (Steve) Johnson and Johnny Wright, the "millers," at the flour mill, filling the sacks with the famous flour, and tying them with the miller's knot. This was quite an art in those times. And, leaving the mill with his one-horse wagon with the flanged sides, was Edgar Walls

delivering corn meal, chicken feed, and other products of the firm in addition to the flour.

It was at about this time on our "clock" that deliveries were being made to such stores as, the aforementioned D. Wagamon & Son, James (Tuck) Clendaniel, John Robinson's Butcher Shop, Joseph and Bob Wall's Butcher Shops, Steven's Store, The Black & Lingo's Grocery and Dry Goods Store, The Delmar White Store, The R. Davis Lingo Store, the Charles Connor Store and many others that left a lasting memory for many.

And, as we listened very closely at the crackling of the burning timbers, we could "hear" faint sounds of the "Old Town Band," performing in the Bandstand which stood at the foot of Federal Street where now Johnny Hastings is pumping gasoline. This Band, under the direction of Dr. Robert B. Hopkins, played each Saturday evening as well as on special occasions, and had on its roster such town notables as J. Leon Black, Morris Black, Benjamin (Ben) Palmer, Robert (Bob) Palmer, William (Dad) Ingram, Riley Ingram, William (Will) Reed, Layton Reed, John Fisher, William Wagamon, Daniel (Dan) Wagamon, among many others.

Many other nostalgic things were brought to mind, among them, the old Volunteer Fire Department, with its hand-drawn hose carts responding to an alarm sounded by the town's church bells; Mrs. Ida Fox's upstairs Silent-Movie House where you had to wait between reel changes, but which showed movies that you could take the children to see; the Bakery beneath the Movie House; the faint cries of a fish peddler or a sissors grinder making known that their rounds were being made through the neighborhood; Joe Waples' Blacksmith Shop, where on Halloween the timber carts and other implements would disappear, to be found the following morning on the old schoolhouse steps, on the porch and even in the upstairs halls.

As the black smoke from the burning building slowly billowed across the "Old Swimming Hole," at the Southwest side of Diamond Lake, this writer could also "see" some other memories drifting with the smoke. There was Handy Prettyman's Ice House within a few feet of the swimming hole, where huge blocks of ice were stored in sawdust after having been cut from the Lake, to be used later. Then, there was the old Jester Hotel, over which the smoke would have drifted had it still been at its location within sight of the Mill, where now stands a modern building of the Methodist Church. Around the hotel could be seen the mingling of the guests that had been transported

to the establishment from the B. & O. Railroad Station in a Model-T Hack. And, if we looked very closely beneath the billows of black smoke, a reflection of a Park could be seen at the rear of the Hotel. An occasional outdoor movie (silent, of course) was shown there. It was also a place for the recreation of the Hotel guest and townspeople.

Of course, the guests of the hotel as well as the townspeople would attend the Church of their choice, and those attending the St. John The Baptist Church would see the new beautiful stained-glass window erected above the Altar in 1929 as a bequest of the former United States Senator, Willard Salisbury, in memory of his mother, Annie Ponder Salisbury, a native of Milton. (Note: from J. T. Scharf's Project Book On Delaware, p. A-1; "Among the notable Art Bequests within the State are four stained-glass windows designed by James H. Hogan, of London, and erected by James Powell & Sons in their White Friars Glass Works in England. These windows, erected under the Will of the late United States Senator, Willard Salisbury, in 1928, may be seen in Trinity Church, Wilmington, Christ Church, Dover, St. Paul's Church, Georgetown, and St. John's Church, in Milton.")

In 1936, extensive remodeling was done, including a veneer of brick making the building much more attractive. These improvements were acknowledged in a special worship service on January 17, 1937, by the Right Reverend Philip Cook.

The Parish Hall, adjoining the Eastern end of the Church building, was completed and dedicated by the Right Reverend Arthur R. McKinstry, assisted by the Reverend Benjamin F. Thompson, on Monday evening, October 6, 1941.

At about this time on our "clock," in the early 1940's, our town was visited by Royalty. The former King of England, and Prince of Wales, Edward, Duke of Windsor, visited the migrant labor camps in this area, whose workers were subjects of England from Jamaica. This writer covered the story for the city dailys, and with representatives of our town officials accompanied the Duke to various working areas.

With the passing of time on our "clock," we see "Tobe" Pettyjohn hauling freight around the town from the old B. & O.; John Milby, traveling through the dirt streets of the town with a one-horse wagon, shoveling up the "leavings" of the traffic (the traffic being mostly horse-drawn vehicles), and occasionally filling a chuck hole with dirt carried in his wagon for that purpose; then there were H. Ernest Conwell and Charles G. Jones, Sr. (known as Jones, The

Holly Wreath Man), both of these firms were well known in the East for their hand-made Holly Wreaths during the Christmas Seasons, an art lost in the passing of time; and, the I. C. King Ford Agency, which stood where the Milton Hardware Store is now located, receiving Model-T Fords in freight cars at the B. & O. Station, with fenders and other parts having to be placed on them at the Garage; also, the Birdsong Tomato Cannery, and the early years of the Draper Cannery, now the huge industry on Chestnut Street known as Draper King Cole.

As we approach the more recent years in time on our "clock," we can still see the "Old Schoolhouse" on Chestnut Street, which, after being vacated as a School, was used for the manufacture of electronics parts. This was completely destroyed by fire of undetermined origin a few years ago. Then, the real oldsters can remember the old Academy, which stood near the banks of the Broadkiln River at the foot of Chestnut Street. This building was used during the early 1900's as a polling place at election time.

In the early morning hours of Wednesday, August 4, 1943, a farmer who lived across the Lake from the Diamond State Roller Mills saw flames coming from the Mill building. By the time firemen arrived, the building was completely engulfed in flames, and the Mill was totally destroyed. However, three other smaller buildings were saved. These were used later to conduct the firm's business while awaiting the rebuilding of a new Mill. The fire consumed over 2,000 bushels of wheat used to make flour. A thousand bushels of corn, eight tons of hard-to-get dried milk products, several hundred pounds of flour and several tons of other feeds were destroyed in the fire. The new building was completed and occupied the following year, however the famous flour was no longer manufactured by the firm.

Ten years later, Mr. Henry C. Wagamon retired, and the Mill was operated by William B. Wagamon, Sr., and his two sons, William B., Jr., and Richard. It was in 1957 that the Mill ceased operating.

This was the year that Milton became "The Mighty-Mite Of Delaware," an honor bestowed upon our Town by Governor Caleb Boggs, during the great Sesqui-Centennial Celebration.

Our "Clock" has now advanced to the present, and lest we forget, we must thank our God for bringing us this far. We hope and pray that our "clock" will go on to bring such pleasant memories to those of future generations who wish to again turn it back for a look-see.

Among the most important items to be seen by future generations will be the link which brings our two main subjects together. For, due to the foresight of a member of the congregation of St. John's Church, Charles G. (Parky) Jones, Jr., a beautiful replica of the Altar of the Church has been placed in the Sunday School Building. This was made by Mr. Jones, with the help of Millard Jenkins, from timbers taken from the Mill building before its destruction. Parky refuses to take all the credit for this beautiful piece of workmanship, and stated, "The three of us made it -- Jesus, Millard and I."

Following are the names of Priests in Charge and Lay Readers serving the Church during the years from 1930 to the present:

M. J. Braun, 1930 - 31
Joseph Wood, 1931 - 36
H. E. Hammond, 1936
E. H. Ehart, 1936 - 38
J. S. Hawks, 1938 - 39
Allan Kay, 1939 - 41
B. F. Thompson, 1941 - 42
George S. Buhl, 1942 - 48
L. Wade Hampton, 1949 - 51
Ralph Parkhill, 1952 - 54
Jesse M. Woodrow, 1955 - 61
Lawrence H. Miller, 1962 - 65
C. Albert Whaley, 1965
Jack McKelvey, 1966 - 70
Ed Martin, 1971 - present

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