

ITS HISTORY IS QUAIN

Founded in 1654, the First Reformed Church Has Prospered.

TRIALS OF POOR DOMINIE POLHEMUS

He and His Family Slept on the Floor—Adults to Watch on New Year's Eve and Children to Celebrate on New Year's Day.

One of the New Year's services in Brooklyn, where a large congregation will watch the old year out and the new year in with prayer and song, will be at the First Reformed (Dutch) Church, Seventh Avenue and Carroll Street.

The service will be a joyous one, and will consist principally of song. The first hour there will be one of the regular prayer meetings of the church. Then, until within a few minutes of midnight, there will be music. The last seconds in the old year will find the people on their knees engaged in prayer.

That is the service for the older people. The little ones, of whom there are many in the church, have a special celebration of New Year's Day, to which they look forward with great pleasure.

In the first place a special part of every Sunday morning's service is devoted entirely to them. It is after the regular service has progressed to the first hymn that the time comes for the children.

There are some 200 of them, and 50 or

qured could be paid to a minister whom she "had never accepted or given a call." And, further, she went on, "he contributes very little to the edification of his congregation." The Sunday before Christmas a sermon was expected, and it was only a prayer, and so short that it was finished before we expected it.

It was allowed that the dominie had arrived late, and was obliged to leave early in order to reach home in good season, but that did not satisfy the Breuckelin hunger for sermons, and the people declared that excuse was the only satisfaction they had for Christmas.

They were sure that they would receive as much edification by reading one of themselves to read on Sundays from the "Apostle Book" as they ever had from the ministerial supervision.

And it was with great sarcasm that they went on: "But be it said, with all reverence, that as those of Midwout have engaged Polhemus without our knowledge we have no objection whatever—nay, we are rather satisfied—that the people of Midwout shall enjoy exclusively the whole service of the aforesaid Rev. Polhemus.

And, in case the Rev. Polhemus should again desire to say his prayers here, in lieu of giving a sermon, as he did before, although we are unwilling to put ourselves under any obligation, still we are disposed to make him, from time to time, some allowance as proof of our good will."

Then, saying that the Rev. Polhemus was thought favorably of, although his services were not desired, the four representatives of Breuckelen signing the communication wished their Honors, the Council, a happy New Year.

But Gov. Stuyvesant was not to be moved even by these wiles. Breuckelen was requested to pay up her just dues.

Poor old Mr. Polhemus, meanwhile, was in dire need, as his parishioners played battledore and shuttlecock with his name. His house was not inclosed, and he, with his wife and children, were obliged to sleep in the cold upon the floor.

So Breuckelen had to be taxed. The list of persons assessed at that time numbered twenty. Among them were "Clutie, house carpenter," 6 florins; "Gerrit, the wheelwright," 6 florins; "Jan, the chimney sweeper," 6 florins; and "Louis, a cooper," 6 florins.

In Valebocht, "Joris Raphalli hath of his own free will promised to give and contribute 10 florins; Jan, the chimney sweeper," was assessed 4 florins, and "Peter Morlett, (say Abram the Turk)," 6, in

seeing the church door open, turned neither to the right nor to the left, but went directly through the building.

The dominies were persons of importance and were welcomed in the homes with all the convivial good cheer of the old Dutch families.

One house opposite the church was called the "dominie's house," and there he transacted all his ecclesiastical business on Sundays. Different dominies were in charge, first of all the churches in the county, and later of one or two.

The Rev. Martinus Schoonmaker was one of these. Mr. Schoonmaker, at the close of a long and faithful career, left a large family. Seven of his eleven children survived him, and at his death he had fifty-nine grandchildren and twenty-one great-grandchildren. Of him, tradition, taking a humorous tone, relates that after performing a marriage ceremony in the Dutch tongue, as usual—the quips of the English language being an unaccustomed task for him—he undertook a few words of the language for the benefit of the guests.

He would have pronounced the couple man and wife, and "one flesh," but a briefer



The Rev. J. M. Farrer, D. D.

translation coming to him, he exclaimed, "I pronounce you two to be one beef!"

He was the last minister to use the Dutch language.

When the old church was removed, another was erected upon a site in Joralemon Street, now occupied by the small park next the municipal buildings. The greater part of the congregation came from the country in green wagons.

The fourth church was built upon the same site in 1835, and was only taken down when the present beautiful building was erected. The first session of a public school in Brooklyn was held in one of these churches.

This was started on Prospect Heights, before the church building was completed, with a Sunday school organized from the old church of thirty pupils. The present church seats 1,200 persons, and is now filled every Sunday.

The building is of pure Gothic architecture and is built in the cruciform shape. It has a beautiful interior. The music is rendered by an excellent quartet. The church stands upon a broad platform and many people of different denominations have been accepted as members.

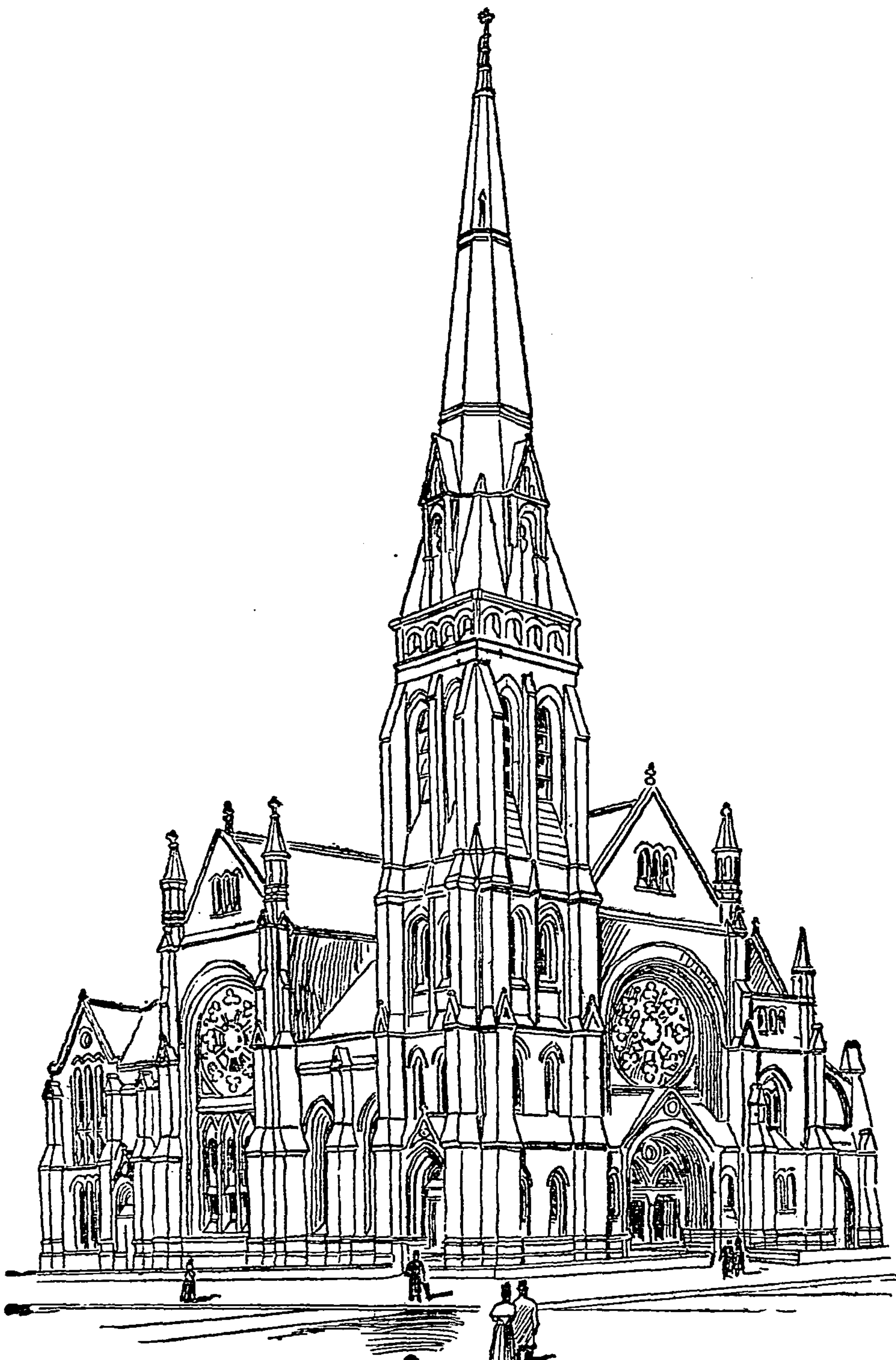
The "Dutch Arms" is a building put up for an exceptionally handsome private residence, and later bought for the church, to be used in connection with its work.

The young women of the parish have the use of it during the daytime and the young men during the evening. It is handsomely furnished with writing materials, all the periodicals of the day, &c. Billiards, pool, and a bowling alley are some of the amusements provided. The F. M. M. (Physical, Mental, and Moral) Fraternity is an organization of young men with an associate organization of women.

Every Saturday night the young men have a little supper at the "Dutch Arms." Occasionally, they surprise their associate members with an invitation to something of the kind, and they, in turn, reciprocate the attention.

The name of the building comes from the arms of the church, which are as well the arms of William of Orange and Brooklyn. Sewing and cooking schools are some of the charities of the church. A physician, too, attends to the sick poor.

The church officers are, besides the pastor: Elders—Charles W. Osborne, Treasurer; Frederick B. Schenck, Clerk; Charles L. Rickerson, William A. Hall; Deacons—Frank S. Field, James S. Suydam, Harry J. Brainerd, and Forrest M. Towl.



First Reformed Church, Seventh Avenue and Carroll Street.

more occupy the infant school benches placed at the front of the church, while the others are with their parents.

There is a hymn for them first—a children's hymn—and then a real sermon is preached to them for five minutes. That is all, but they like it and come again and again.

While a short interlude is played on the organ, they troop out to the nursemaids awaiting them in the vestibules.

It is very pleasant, but there is another pleasant part of it which they enjoy on New Year's morning.

This year the children have been invited to the Dutch Arms, a large, handsome building opposite the church which answers the purposes of a parish house, where the Rev. W. J. M. Farrer, the pastor of the church, will distribute prizes for the best records kept of the texts and sermons heard by them during the year.

For two years the prizes have been distributed from Mr. Farrer's house, but the infant congregation has increased in size until it overflows the rooms of an ordinary private residence.

At the Christmas service, when they nearly filled the church, there were 320 children from the infant class alone.

The church is the oldest on Long Island. The present building was dedicated in 1891, but the church was founded in 1654, and its history is interesting.

The good and religious Dutchmen of Long Island had grown very tired of crossing the ferry to supply their spiritual needs, and the Rev. Johannes Theodorus Polhemus, a Netherlands missionary, just from Itamarca, Brazil, came to dwell among them, and settled in Flatbush.

So far, so good. But the people of Brooklyn were possessed of weight and distinction in their dealings with the serious affairs of life then as now. The first necessity after the arrival of the much-desired dominie was a church edifice and a house, and to obtain these as speedily as possible, Gov. Stuyvesant decreed that the residents of Breuckelin should assist the people of Flatbush (Midwout it was then) and Amersfoort, Flatlands, by cutting and hauling wood.

That was quite fair, all the Breuckelin people agreed as regards the church by which they were to benefit, but as to putting up a house for the preacher, who was not to dwell among them, that, they decided, should be the work of the Midwout people alone.

But the power of the Government was not to be set aside, and Breuckelin unwillingly completed her task of cutting and hauling only to find that more grievances awaited her.

She was asked to contribute a third to the salary of her spiritual guide, and that was the cause of trouble all around, until poor Dominie Polhemus must have wished he had remained with his Brazilian heathen.

This matter Breuckelin took up with dignity and "solicited with reverence," that the Rev. Mr. Polhemus be allowed to preach alternately at Breuckelin and Midwout. Then she would cheerfully contribute.

The Directors and Council kindly granting their permission to the arrangement "whenever the weather would permit," Breuckelin was contented, only to find Amersfoort disgruntled.

So Dominie Polhemus, whom history records as a good and pious man, meekly allowed arrangements to be made whereby he could preach on Sunday evenings, alternately, at Breuckelin and Amersfoort.

Then Breuckelin, whose municipal feelings had evidently not recovered from the first injustice of unduly exacting and hauling, took a bold step and put her complaints into words.

She made known to her superiors the fear she had that the Rev. Mr. Polhemus's talents "do not accompany him as of yore." Moreover, the invasion by savages had left her in a depleted condition, and she did not feel that so much money as was re-

quired could be paid to a minister whom she "had never accepted or given a call."

That was the way the church affairs were arranged in the infancy of the City of Churches, and before she had one sacred edifice within her precincts.

It was not until 1658 that she finally secured a resident dominie.

The Rev. Henricus Selyns, Breuckelen's first minister, came from Amsterdam. He was the descendant of a long line of Deacons, Elders, and ministers, to be traced back to the foundation of the Church.

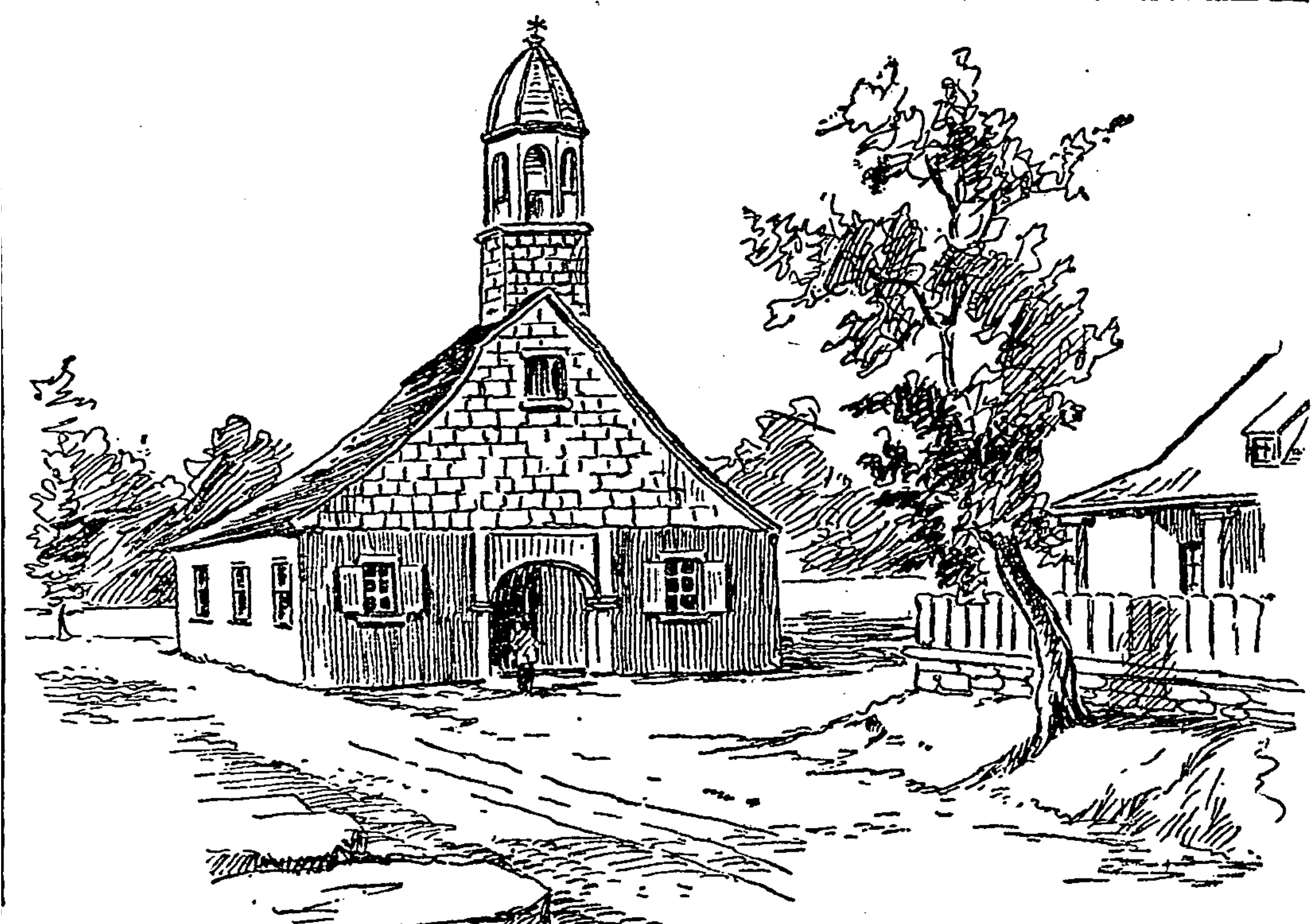
His grandmother, Agneta Selyns, had been a Deaconess in the same church in which his grandfather had been a Deacon. The congregation under the aegis of his circumstances worshipped in a barn. But they had at least a bell, which Mr. Selyns requested from the West Indian Company.

They had some difficulty in paying the salary of their minister, after they had at last secured him, and appealed for assistance. That was granted them by Gov. Stuyvesant, who agreed to contribute 250 guilders, personally, if Mr. Selyns would preach a sermon on Sunday afternoon at his "bouwrey," on Manhattan Island.

The Rev. Mr. Polhemus had been notified of the installation of Mr. Selyns and promptly sent him a list of the church members, altogether twenty-seven persons, including one Elder and two Deacons. But Mr. Selyns's stay was not long, and Breuckelen went back to the divided ministrations of the faithful Dominie Polhemus.

Then, in 1690, she built her first church upon the foundation, tradition says, of a fort erected to protect the settlers from the savages.

It was upon a wild untenanted country



The Society's First Church, Fulton and Lawrence Streets.

road, where Fulton and Lawrence Streets now cross. It remained for a hundred years, when a more spacious structure was put up in its place.

This was a large, square building, with thick, solid walls, plastered and whitewashed to the eaves. The roof ascended to a peak in the center, and was capped by a belfry, in which was a small, clear-toned bell.

Inside it was so dark and gloomy that it was not possible to read at 4 o'clock on a bright Summer's day. The windows were small, six or eight feet from the floor, and filled with stained glass sent from Holland, a design of masses of flowers.

The building was set in the middle of the road, which led from the ferry into the country, with a carriage or wagon track running around it. The road was in a wretched condition, full of mudholes and rocks.

Tradition tells another tale of it in Revolutionary days. It is said that an English soldier came up the road on horseback, and