BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Gray (1798-1868) was born in the county of Monaghan in the North of Ireland in 1798 and was raised in Clontiberit by his maternal grandfather. He attended the University of Glasgow and was licensed for ministry in 1820 by the Presbytery of Monaghan. On October 8, 1820, he married Jane Lewers (1796-1871), the daughter of William and Susanna Lewers of Castleblayney and graduate of the Moravian Academy at Grace Hill near Belfast. The day after they were married the young couple embarked from Londonderry on the *Halifax* bound for a new life as missionaries in North America.

The newlyweds’ voyage across the Atlantic proved to be absolutely frightful. The voyage that normally took less than six-weeks turned into a six-month odyssey. Severe storms blew the ship off course and they never reached their New York destination. Provisions ran out and they were forced to exist on a ration of a few potatoes a day. Storms tormented the ship day after day while they lived in fear for their lives and of mutiny by the crew. Finally, after numerous brushes with death, they landed on the island of Bermuda. After a three-week respite in Bermuda, they set sail for New Brunswick, Canada where John Gray preached for eighteen months. This was followed by a short stint in New York City, after which he was called to Easton, PA in September of 1822.

John Gray was to stay at the fledgling First Presbyterian Church on Spring Garden Street in Easton as a supply preacher for a short time, but remained in that position for six years. By a unanimous vote the congregation decided to hire him as their full time minister and the Presbytery of Newton installed him on September 15, 1828. John Gray’s pastorate at the First Presbyterian Church lasted in all 44 years and four months, during which time he enrolled 1161 member, baptized 953 individuals, married 519 couples and oversaw the physical expansion of the church building. His was the longest ministry in the church’s history. The Grays lived near the church and had seven children, of which six lived to adulthood.

Lafayette College figured importantly in the lives of the Gray family. John Gray became closely associated with Lafayette’s first president George Junkin, a fellow Presbyterian minister. Early college commencements were held at the First Presbyterian Church and in 1839, Gray was elected to Lafayette’s Board of Trustees, a position which he retained until 1852. Junkin’s stormy administration at Lafayette caused ripples for John Gray as well, even though he attempted to play peacemaker.

Things worsened when George Junkin returned in 1844 for his second administration at Lafayette. Junkin began to insist that the First Presbyterian Church was too small, and agitated for the establishment of another downtown Easton Church. The ensuing rift, which may have even included an attempt by Junkin to replace Gray with his brother David Junkin, left a legacy
of bitterness. Things cooled down when Junkin left Lafayette for the second and last time in
1848.

John Gray served the First Presbyterian Church until his health failed in 1867. He died in 1868
and Mrs. Gray in 1871. Both were buried in the First Church Cemetery until 1942 when they
were reinterred in Easton Cemetery. A photograph of John Gray hangs in the church on Spring
Garden Street.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Gray Collection documents aspects of the career and life of Reverend John Gray and his
wife Jane Lewers Gray. Included are his personal leatherbound bible, a portion of his personal
diary, a memorial sermon, pieces regarding his life, family and career at First Presbyterian
Church of Easton, and a poem written by his wife Jane Lewers Gray.

Gray's own maroon leather bound Bible carries his name in gold letters on the inside cover. The
front end papers contain some notes relating to important dates in Gray’s life. A small journal
contains Gray’s own records spanning 1822-1866. This journal contains notes on sermons and
lectures with references to Bible verses as well as the time, date, location, and weather conditions
on the days he preached. Some pages contain financial statements and other personal remarks
such as a recipe for salve written in the front cover of the book. A published sermon (1863)
memorializing the life of Rev. John Gray by W. Henry Green.

There are two photocopies of items written by Jane Lewers Gray. One item is a hymn written for
the inauguration in 1834 of Dr. Junkin, the first President of Lafayette College. The second item
is poem written in 1835 entitled “My Dear Husband,” the original of this poem is held by the
Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society.

Also included are photocopies of a history of John and Jane Lewers Gray collected by Mary
Wright Winters of Claremont, California compiled in 1979. It contains a family tree, a biography
of Jane Lewers Gray and her children, as well as the personal diary of John Gray which records
the trip that he and Jane made to America in 1820. The diary, written in the form of a letter to
Jane’s parents, is filled with a hair raising personal account of their six-month voyage on board
crude Halifax. (This diary was reported to have been at Lafayette College at the time the
writer’s compendium was issued in 1979; at this writing (2002) no records or trace of the original
diary has been found.)

Finally, there are copies of pages from other sources that document John Gray's life as a
Bentley, is a compilation of the history of the First Presbyterian Church of Easton. Chapter IV contains a good biographical sketch of Gray. Also, there is a photocopy of a pamphlet called “The Story of 175 Years; 1811-1986” written by Benjamin F. Kizer which is an addendum to the book written by Bentley and covers one hundred and seventy five years of history at First Presbyterian Church.

RELATED COLLECTIONS

Selections from the poetical writings of Jane Lewers Gray
New York: Printed by Edward O. Jenkins, for Anson D.F. Randolph & Co., 1872
URL for this publication: https://libcat.lafayette.edu/record=b2862186

INVENTORY

Folders
1 John Gray’s personal Bible

   - Preached February 16, 1868, by Rev. W. Henry Green D.D.
   New York: John A. Gray & Green, Printers, 1868

3 Notebook of Sermons, 1822-1866

4 Photocopies of writings of Jane Lewers: 1834 & 1835
   - Hymn for the inauguration of Dr. Junkin, President Lafayette College: 1834
   - Poem “My Dear Husband”: May 18, 1835

5 “The Lewers of Castleblayney: The Dispersion of a Huguenot family over 300 years”
   Claremont California: Collected by Mary Wright Winters, July 1979

6 Photocopied Histories of the First Presbyterian Church
   “Sesquicentennial Story of the First Presbyterian Church, Easton, PA 1811-1961”
   Pages 33-49, By Virginia Williams Bentley, 1961
   “The First Presbyterian Church, Easton, PA - The Story of 175 years – 1811-1986”
   By Benjamin F. Kizer, 1986