

## **Reverend Nathaniel Randolph Snowden (1770-1850)**

Pastor to Derry 1793-1796

Nathaniel Randolph Snowden was born in Philadelphia in 1770, the son of Isaac Snowden. He was the first minister at Derry Church to have been born on American soil. Snowden was one of five sons, four of whom became ministers. He came from a long line of Presbyterian ancestors, one of whom was the first Elder ordained in Pennsylvania, perhaps the first in the United States.

He graduated from Princeton College in 1787. At various times throughout his life, Snowden taught the classics in Carlisle, Lancaster and Franklin, Pennsylvania. His teaching was done to supplement his salary as a pastor.

Derry Church was served by numerous supply pastors for about two years after Reverend John Elder's death in 1791. At a meeting of the Carlisle Presbytery on April 9, 1793, a call was offered to Mr. Snowden from the united congregations of Harrisburg (now Market Street), Paxton and Derry Churches. The terms of the call specified that each congregation would pay the sum of 50 pounds annually (a salary of less than \$500 a year) as long as he continued to serve as their pastor.

Derry Church pew rental records at that time indicate that 40 families were regular contributors and the entire congregation numbered at least 70 families who lived approximately 6-10 miles from church. Some members lived near the Susquehanna River while others lived north of Swatara Creek toward the Blue Mountains.

Mr. Snowden accepted the call and was installed on October 2, 1793. Coming after Reverend Elder's 50-plus years of service, the young and inexperienced Mr. Snowden faced a significant challenge. His ministry to the three churches only lasted two years and six months. In this short time, he made a strong impression on his congregants; those of the older generation appreciated and often spoke of his vast learning and strong piety. He was praised for his knowledge of Greek scripture, as with his English Testament, using it constantly in his private reading.

About a year after taking charge of three congregations, Reverend Snowden asked to be released from Derry Church, claiming the work was too much for his health. In addition, the growing trouble between the city and country churches seemed to be a difficult situation to settle. In a 1795 letter to Presbytery, Paxton Church asked to remain with Derry rather than the Harrisburg church which was not properly organized until 1794. The letter stated, "If Mr. Snowden is rendered incapable of undergoing the fatigue of three congregations in less than three years in the prime of his life, by all probability he will not be able in a short time to attend to two congregations, and of consequence we shall be left without a pastor and the means of giving a call to

another.” Relations were severed with the two country churches in 1796 and Mr. Snowden continued to serve the Harrisburg church until 1805. Subsequently he became pastor of the Millerstown Church from 1818-1820.

Reverend Snowden married Sara Guistine, who, at the time of her death in 1852, was the last survivor of the [Revolutionary War Wyoming Valley \(Pennsylvania\) massacre](#), having escaped with her parents down the Susquehanna River on a flat boat. Reverend Snowden died in 1850 at the home of his son in Armstrong County, Pennsylvania.

There is a stained glass window in memory of Reverend Nathaniel Snowden on the east wall of the Chapel.