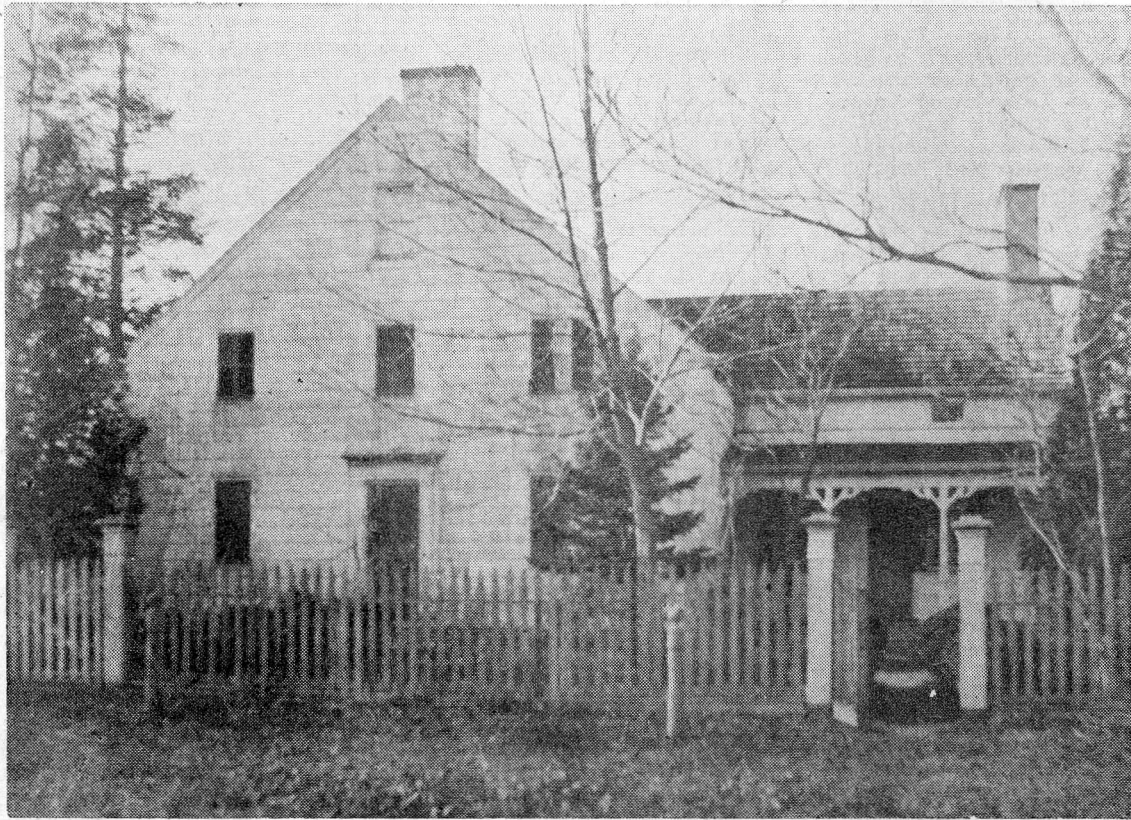


# The Patchogue Advance

BELOVED PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER

## Story of The Rev. Ezra 'Priest' King



**OLD HOMESTEAD** of the Rev. Ezra "Priest" King in Middle Island is pictured. The Rev. Mr. King was pastor of Middle Island and South Haven Presbyterian Churches from 1810 to 1844.

By Thomas R. Bayles

The Rev. Ezra King, pastor of the Middle Island and South Haven Presbyterian churches from 1810 to 1844, was born in East Marion July 24, 1784. His father was Jeremiah King, a soldier in the Revolution, and he was a direct descendant of William King of England, who settled in Salem, Mass., in 1635. Ezra King received his early education in his native village, taught school a few years, and then decided to study for the ministry.

He studied at Clinton Academy in East Hampton, and in 1808 commenced the study of theology under the Rev. Aaron Woolworth, pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Bridgehampton. He completed his course under the Rev. Lyman Beecher, pastor of the Presbyterian Church at East Hampton, and in 1809 was licensed to preach by the Long Island Presbytery.

In May 1810 he was called to supply the parishes of Middletown (Middle Island) and South Haven, and in the Spring of 1811 he was given a call to become the pastor of these two churches. On October 14, 1811 he married Lydia Youngs of East Marion, a descendant of the Rev. John Youngs, first minister

of the Southold Church in 1640. They moved into the house which had been built by the Rev. Herman Daggett, the minister before him. It stood across the road from the Middle Island Church. He later bought the house and farm adjoining it of about 100 acres that extended up Church Lane to Half Mile Pond or Pine Lake as it is now called. This farm also included a tract on the east side of the road adjoining the church, and on a part of which is now located the Presbyterian Church manse, that was purchased in 1959. In addition to the work as pastor he conducted his farm, and also taught pupils at his home, before the first school in Middle Island was built about 1816, that stood just east of the church. He was also appointed by the town as one of the school inspectors for several years. His wife died September 24, 1814, leaving him with two small children, Thomas and Lydia.

On September 10, 1816 he married Eliza Helme of Miller Place, and six children were born to them. Her grandmother was Hannah Smith, daughter of Major William Henry Smith, a son of Col. William Tangier Smith, who settled in Setauket in 1686, and later purchased the Manor of St. George from the Indians.

Eliza Helme, while a girl of 13 years of age, attended a school for girls conducted by Mrs. Lyman Beecher in her home at East Hampton in 1806, and while there made a beautiful picture of a Biblical scene embroidered in col-

ored silk floss, as taught by Mrs. Beecher. This picture was hung for a great many years on the wall in the homestead of Mrs. Richard M. Bayles of Middle Island, mother of Thomas and Albert Bayles, and who was a granddaughter of the Rev. Ezra King and his wife, Eliza.

It was an active life that "Priest King" (as he was affectionately called by the members of his parishes) led, and he covered his immense territory mostly on horseback. In addition to Middle Island and Yaphank this included South Haven, which extended from Moriches to Patchogue. It was during his pastorate that the South Haven Church was built in 1828, which has just been moved to a new location in Brookhaven. Also, the present Middle Island Church was built in 1837, while he was here, to replace the first one built in 1766. The church record for April 30, 1837, contains the following record with regard to leaving the old meeting house: "May much seed that has here been sown yet spring up and be abundantly realized in a glorious harvest that shall wave in immortal beauty over the dust and remains of this demolished temple." Thirty-six members were received into the church during that year.

The Autumn of 1833 was a time of sorrow for pastor King, as his aged mother died October 15, and his wife, Eliza, December 21, leaving him with six children under 15 years of age, and one of them

a baby of 11 months.

By 1839 his health began to fail from overwork in caring for his large family, his farm and two churches, so he asked the Presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relations between him and the two churches, which was done, and the union that had existed between the churches was ended. At this time the combined membership of the two churches was 184.

The Rev. Mr. King continued as stated supply in the Middle Island Church until 1844, when he retired and moved with his family to Miller Place, where he built a home which stands just south of the home of Milton Davis. Here he lived until his death February 7, 1867, in the eighty-third year of his life and was laid to rest in the cemetery across the road from the church he had served so long in Middle Island.

He was held in the highest esteem and affection by the two churches of his parish, and suitable resolutions were inscribed in the Session records of both churches. Through the efforts of William Sidney Smith of Longwood, a monument was erected in 1868 to his memory by the members of his two churches, which carries the following inscription: "Grateful friends have erected this monument in memory of their beloved pastor, who for 34 years devoted the vigor of his life to the united parishes of Middletown and South Haven. By his ardent piety, eloquent preaching and fervent prayers, his warm affection, true friendship and courteous dignity, he has left an enduring example to both church and the world."

The Rev. Mr. King was pastor at Middle Island for 34 years, the longest time of any minister in the history of the church. As we look back over the 150 years since he came to Middle Island, we find many changes have taken place, but the Middle Island Presbyterian Church still serves the community, and is active and growing at the present time under the leadership of the Rev. Edwin G. Townsend, who came to the church as pastor in 1958.