

THE LONGSWAMP CHURCH

This church was exclusively Reformed, for almost one hundred years. It is one of their oldest churches. Seventy or seventy-five years ago, the pressure of the popular spirit of that day became so great, that it too was made union.

It is located on the northern slope of a spur of the Lehigh hills, elsewhere known as the South Mountain, near the eastern boundary of Longswamp township. It is about half a mile south of Shamrock, on the East Penn Railroad.

The first settlers from Oley, lying to the southwest, and those from Goshenhoppen, east of south, came to this section in 1734-35. A few among the first from Oley arrived in 1710. These early settlers certainly had a hard time of it. We are told that for a time at least, the branches of trees formed the roofs of their kitchens, and the body of their wagons, their sleeping rooms.

This, in the opinion of Dr. Helffrich, who advances excellent reasons for his view, was the original Little Lehigh church. Some of the sources of that stream are formed here. It is the only church besides the Galzburg or Galisburg church, then known as the Schmalzgrass, located on this stream. Schlatter could not possibly have meant the church which still bears the name "Lehigh church" at the present time, as that was exclusively Lutheran then. The name Longswamp, as applied to this church, was introduced as early as 1762.

The name is said to have originated from the fact that along the whole length of Toad Run (Krottecrick), a small stream of water, flowing eastward from Topton along this ridge, until it empties into the Little Lehigh, the land was marshy and so this narrow swamp strip was called the Longswamp. Settlements were fairly commenced in 1734. They increased year by year. The large majority of them were Reformed—Palatines, Swiss and Huguenots.

Frederic Hoelwig, cantor of the congregation, gives 1748 as the time of organization. But prior to this, services had been held in private houses, sermons being read. The building committee were: Joseph Biry and Samuel Burger (now Borger). Others who aided in the work were Leopold Greber, Theobald Carl, Jacob Fenstermacher, Johannes Fried, Peter Butz, Nicolaus Schwartz, Nicolaus Mertz, David Mertz, Peter Mertz, Heinrich Bolinger, Christian Ruth, Philip Burger, Nicolaus Keiser, Peter Keiser, Peter Walbert, Bernhard Fegeh, Heinrich Strickner, Jacob Lang, Heinrich Egner, David DeLong, Jacob Daniel, Yost H. Sassamanshausen (not being a member, contributed only money) and others. This is Dr. Helffrich's list of names.

As usual in those days, the church was built of logs, the interstices being filled with small blocks or large chips, plastered over with clay. The seats were hewn planks. It is not stated whether the floor was of brick, of flags, or the native earth. This building remained in use about 43 years.

Preparations for a new church were made in 1790. There was some difference of opinion as to the proper location. ~~It had been decided in the Ziegel church, it was decided according to an old custom of the Palatinate, by throwing their hats to the point desired.~~ The church was placed somewhat further up the slope. The cornerstone was laid by Henry Haertzel or Heutzel, on May 28, 1791. When completed it was also dedicated by him.

Permission was now given the Lutherans, who had also organized a congregation here, to occupy this church for a given period at a nominal rent, in 1817. At the expiration of the term, the compact was renewed. When this was again to be renewed, difficulties arose. Some wanted the Lutherans admitted to equal rights. Others were opposed to it. Feeling ran so high that the Lutherans withdrew in 1837. A small number of the Reformed withdrew with them, and a union church was erected at Mertztown, barely a mile distant. Some of the Lutherans however, remained, and then a right to the property was given them, and this church also became a union church.

It is with reference to this matter that Dr. Helffrich uses this very vigorous language: "This was great folly (Dies warren grosse Dummheiten). Why four congregations instead of two? Had each congregation had its own separate church, each would have had its own services, and each would have been unhampered in pursuing its own interests and providing for its own needs." He then adds: "Besides very few reflected that the future might bring other conditions, and then it would not be easy to make up for that which was lost, and to make amends for the errors of the past."

September 30 and October 1, 1848, the centennial was celebrated. It was the first one observed in this vicinity. This of course, concerned the Reformed congregation chiefly, as the Lutherans had worshipped in the church as a congregation only a little more than thirty years, and were part owners only ten or eleven years. The speakers were: Revs. Dr. Kessler, Eichenberg and S. K. Brobst. Without further comment, we might say this capped the climax of incongruities, when a man like Rev. S. K. Brobst, who always spoke in opposition ~~of union churches,~~ appeared as the mouth-piece of one, and took part in this centennial, when the Lutheran congregation was but young, its right to the church but ten years old, and that held under protest. His conduct was really a condoning of what he at other times declared "great folly."

In the early part of 1852 the building of a third church was agitated. To test the matter, Rev. W. A. Helffrich, the Reformed pastor, a young man, was appointed to solicit subscriptions. In three or four days it was made manifest that the necessary amount could be readily secured. Arrangements were therefore immediately made to begin the work, and to complete it, before the end of the year.

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Dr. Helffrich gives this striking account of the last service: "First, however, the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated once more in the church, by the holding of a union communion. This was to be the last service, and on the following day the church was to be demolished. The service at which this communion was to take place, was held on Tuesday and Wednesday, May 5 and 6. Both pastors preached at this service, Rev. Jeremiah Schindel occupying the pulpit on the day of the preparatory service, and Rev. W. A. Helffrich, D. D., on the day of communion. Then the two administered the communion to the two congregations." Unless greatly mistaken, this is the same man who denounced the admission of the Lutherans as "grosse Dummheiten." Possibly he was trying to surpass himself.

In the following day when the building was taken down, it was found that all the contents of the cornerstone had wasted away. This might possibly be considered by some as a proper sequel to the performance of the day before. For what need of written or printed evidence to show that the church was not what it was dedicated to be, when they had furnished living proof of the fact that they were neither Lutheran, nor Reformed, and that they felt proud of the fact? The travesty of the day before, had made printed and written proof of the fact that the intention of the founders had been entirely abandoned altogether unnecessary.

May 9, the cornerstone of the new edifice was laid. The ministers who took part in this service were Rev. Jeremiah Schindel, Lutheran; Revs. Augustus Dechant and William A. Helffrich, D. D., Reformed. December 25, it was dedicated. Upon this occasion Revs. Jeremiah Schindel, S. K. Brobst and G. A. Hinterleitner, D. D., Lutheran and Rev. Erasmus Helffrich, Reformed, took part in the services.

It is a brick building, with galleries on three sides, with the pipe organ on the west gallery, facing the pulpit. It is also furnished with tower and bell. There is a large heater in the cellar. This third church was placed still further up the slope, outside the cemetery, and beyond the street. It has been suggested that after the church shall have been moved to the top of the hill, it will have secured the best possible location, giving a full view of the entire valley beyond.

It may be of interest to give a complete list of the pastors who have served this church, including those who had served before it was made union, seventy years ago, as far as possible.

Frederic Cassimer Miller, irregular, apparently never ordained, before the first church was built.

Philip Jacob Michael, 1748 to 1753, not ordained.

Rev. Hans Rudolf Kittenweiler, or Kidenweiler, 1754-60 or 61, ordained in Germany. Died at Great Swamp, October, 1764.

Philip Jacob Michael again June 1763, and close of 1774; then entered the Continental army.

Rev. John H. Helffrich, 1775-1780, ordained, connected with the Coetus.

P. J. Michael, a third time, very brief. Henry Hertzell or Heutzell, until after the dedication of the second church.

Rev. John H. Helffrich again, until his death in 1810.

Rev. William Dechant, 1811-1815.

Rev. John Helffrich, 1816-1852.

Rev. William A. Helffrich, D. D., ordained 1845, assistant until 1852, then sole pastor until close of his ministry.

Rev. Nevin Helffrich, assistant to his father from 1850. Sole pastor after his father's retirement until 1906.

Although only seventy years have elapsed since the Lutherans were admitted to joint ownership, the list of their pastors is nearly, if not quite, as long as that of the Reformed, during 169 or 170 years.

It might not be amiss to state that some of the parochial reports in the minutes of Synod are quite misleading. Thus e. g. Longswamp is the name applied to one of the congregations served by Rev. I. Roeller, up to 1853, although he and his congregation had withdrawn from this church in 1837, organized and built the Mertztown church. Apparently his congregation was also known as Longswamp and not as Mertztown. But surely there should have been something to show that he no longer preached in the same church.

Apparently the first pastor to serve the Lutheran congregation worshipping in this church, was Rev. Jacob Miller, D. D., 1817-1822. Whether the Lutherans were permitted to hold services in this church before this time is not at all certain. It is however pretty certain, that they did not meet here regularly before this time.

He was succeeded by his brother, Rev. Conrad Miller, 1822-1831, who moved to New Hanover in 1829, when Dr. Miller came to Reading.

Rev. Isaac Roeller, 1831-1837. This Lutheran congregation then left this church, and with some dissatisfied members of the Reformed congregation, built the Mertztown union church.

Rev. C. A. Griebler, 1838-1843. The Lutherans who had not gone with Rev. Mr. Roeller, were now admitted to joint ownership in this church, and organized another congregation. Rev. Griebler, licensed in 1838 and ordained in 1839, now became the pastor of this second Lutheran congregation, until deposed by Synod in 1843.

Candidate Peter L. Oberfield, licensed in 1844, ordained in 1846, served this congregation with Lynntown (Lynnville), in 1844, when he removed to Tamaqua, where he perished in the great Schuylkill flood in 1850.

Rev. Jeremiah Schindel became his successor in 1847 or 1848. How long he remained cannot be determined from

the minutes of Synod. He did not report this congregation by name. He reports eight congregations from the time of entering this field, giving only seven names, for five or eight years. This one is never named. But it is almost absolutely certain that he was pastor until 1852. For, he took part in that union communion, in the cornerstone laying and the dedication as pastor. According to statements made by his son, Dr. J. D. Schindel, he did not take charge of Longswamp immediately upon entering the field.

Dr. Helffrich, pastor of the Reformed congregation for half a century, names Dr. Hinterleitner as Rev. Mr. Schindel's successor. But during his entire term at Kutztown and Oley, Dr. Hinterleitner never reported this congregation. Evidently he did not regard himself as the regular pastor, but only a supply. We can therefore only say that from 1847 to 1857, Longswamp, sometimes vacant, was served by Rev. Jeremiah Schindel, and possibly for a brief period by Dr. Hinterleitner as supply.

Rev. Ferdinand Berkemeyer then had charge of the Lutheran congregation, from the fall of 1857 to the close of 1858 or beginning of 1859.

E. H. M. Sell took charge of this congregation, Fogelsville and DeLongs, in 1859 and remained until 1861.

Rev. A. D. Croll, a licentiate of the West Pennsylvania Synod, subsequently ordained by the Ministerium, was the pastor from 1862 until April 1868.

In the fall Rev. S. R. Boyer became the pastor and remained until 1872.

In the fall of 1872, Rev. D. K. Humbert took charge and remained until 1903.

While his case was pending in Synod, the pulpit was supplied under the direction of the president of Conference, but in the fall of 1904, Rev. W. F. Boyd was called to the field, and by the decision of the congregation, settled at Shamrock.

It would be impossible to give the exact membership. But it might surprise some to be informed that a list of names supposed to contain the members of both congregations, numbered over 1100.