

The First Church 1761 - 1798

The following translation from a poorly written German church document, portions of which are missing, relates to an agreement regarding the first church edifice and the mutual interests expressed by both congregations:

"Today, the 18th of February, 1760, we, the Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed congregations were together and agreed to buy a piece of land from Jacob Hoffman in Lynn Township, Northampton County, lying between the lands of Philip Anthony and Peter Scholl, on which to build a union church and a schoolhouse for our two religions, everything to remain joint, and each congregation is to have equal rights.

"As to the preachers, each congregation is to elect its own and also pay his salary, the elections to be made by majority vote. Neither congregation or preacher is to have precedence over the other and services are to be held on alternate Sundays as predetermined.

"A table is to be built at the altar which is for use of both congregations." Concerning the so-called offering *money*, this is to be used for purchase of wine for communion, and what remains is to be used for building the church or schoolhouse, or for other useful purposes.

"Concerning the chairs, there shall be one chair which is for the use of both preachers and, also their chairs shall be used by the elders and deacons of both religions. All other chairs or seats are for use of members of both congregations.

"If anyone begins a strife between the two congregations, that person shall be fined forty schillings, the fine to go into the building fund of the church and schoolhouse, or to other useful purposes.

The document concludes with the following signatures:

Seller

JACOB HOFFMAN

Church Representatives

PHILIP WERTMAN

PETER BEISSEL

PHILIP MOSSER

HEINRICH WIDERSTEIN

H (o) W (Witnessed)

MAX WANNEMACHER

Church records also record a statement written in German by Jacob Hoffman, acknowledging receipt of money paid for the land. It reads as follows:

"Today, the fifth of January, 1761, I had a reckoning with deacons Philip Mosser, Heinrich Widerstein, Peter Beissel, and Philip Wertman for what they paid me for the land for the union church, the sum of twenty pounds, seven schillings and six pence; the seven schillings and six pence is for drink money. I certify that I have received the above mentioned sum.

/S/ Jacob Hoffman"

In spite of the raging French-and-Indian War, the construction of the first church building got under way in 1761. According to one account, construction had been planned as early as 1750. However, the Indians, who had a village in the vicinity, became troublesome and burned down more than half of the dwellings of the settlers. Therefore, building was postponed from year to year until it was considered safe to proceed. The edifice, as everywhere at that time, was constructed with logs. There was no flooring or any side-boarding. An ordinary table served for the altar, the pulpit was constructed of rough boards and an organ stood to one side. It was because of the organ that the first building was known as the Orgel Kirche (Organ Church). It was the only structure at the time with such an instrument.

Upon completion of the building, a dedicatory service was conducted by the Rev. Philip Michael, a weaver by trade, who began to function in the area in 1745 as an irregular Reformed minister. Assisting was a Lutheran pastor, the Rev. Herman Schellhardt, an assistant to the Rev. Heinrich Melchior Muhlenberg.

A noteworthy event relating to the first church was the first baptism which took place on May 10, 1761.² Anna Catharine Kraushaar, daughter of Nicholas and Elisabeth Kraushaar, was christened by Daniel Schumacher, a pastor of the Lutheran Allemaengel Church in Berks County. George Michael Kuntz and Catharine Widerstein were sponsors.

Evidence of disagreements between congregations is recorded in church records as early as July 31, 1766:

"On July 31, 1766 Peter Beissel, Philip Mosser, Martin Schuck, and Mathias Schutz, deacons of the union church in Lynn Township, in the name of the whole congregation, named four nonpartisan men to settle some differences which have come to light in the above named church, and they come to the following conclusions, namely:

"That each congregation shall have the right to elect their own minister and must also pay him; the other party shall have no say in this, and when in the future there is something to repair or to build in the church or the schoolhouse, each congregation shall each time pay half of the costs. Concerning the money received from offerings, the money that has been collected up to this time, and what remains, shall be used for the union congregations; but what is collected from

here on at Lutheran services shall be kept for their use, and the same applies to the money collected at the Reformed services; it shall be kept for use of the Reformed congregation.

"Further, the money collected or is yet due, shall belong to the union congregations and shall be used for union purposes.

"To certify this, we, the elected persons, have today signed this agreement on the day and year mentioned above.

/S/ Peter Roth

/S/ Peter Miller

/S/ Hans G. R. G. Schnepf

/S/ Steffan Bobbenmaier"

By the mid- and late-1760s the church had acquired other names in addition to "Orgel Kirche." One of the names, Allemaengel, was not used very long since there was an older congregation in Berks County by that name. The name Lynn Township Church also began to be used and appeared in the minutes of the Coetus and the Ministerium, which at that time were the Reformed and Lutheran administrative bodies, respectively. The name Ebenezer, a Biblical term that signifies "stone of help," first appears in a church record dated August 25, 1766. This record is not only important because it indicates the use of the name Ebenezer; it also sheds light on an agreement to construct the first parochial school associated with the church. The following is a translation of the accord:

"Lynn Township, Northampton County, August 25, 1766

"We, members of both Reformed and Lutheran congregations of Ebenezer Church, announce herewith that today we settled all difference of whatever nature they may be, and have agreed to build a schoolhouse and hire a teacher jointly and, if the schoolmaster cannot play the organ, he is not to receive any salary but is to have the right to live on the school property and to receive whatever is paid by the parents for teaching their children. He is to teach their children without showing any partiality.

"If differences arise in either congregation or in the school, which are attributed to the teacher, six men are to be selected; three Lutheran, three Reformed, three representing the side of those who bring the complaint and three representing the other side. If they cannot come to an agreement, these six shall select a seventh person who is to cast the deciding vote.

"If the teacher is found at fault, he has to leave and another has to be selected. The right to choose a teacher alternately belongs to the Reformed and Lutheran representatives. If the side (be it Reformed or Lutheran) whose turn it is to select a teacher has no one who can play the organ, then the other side, if they have an organist available, may make the selection."

The document concludes with the signatures as follows:

Deacons of the Lutheran congregation

PHILIP MOSSER

VALENTIN SCHUCK

Deacons of the Reformed congregation

PETER BEISSEL

MATHIAS SCHUTZ

Members of both congregations

DIETDRICH BALTDAUFF

PETER SCHOLL

CHRISTIAN REYS

JOHANNES SCHMIDT

Meanwhile the French-and-Indian War had drawn to a conclusion in 1763 and England's position in the American colon appeared secure. The colonies thus remained dependencies completely subject to the authority of the Crown and Parliament. The citizens of Lynn Township, as everywhere else, were the victims of harassment and numerous Acts of Parliament which levied burdensome taxes on the colonies, especially at the beginning of the decade of the 1770s. Unaware that their program of closer imperial control was stirring up a colonial revolution, the English went bumbling along from one ill-chosen method of repression to another. Of course, the final blow was the tax levied on tea and the punishment the Crown and Parliament sought to inflict upon Massachusetts as a consequence of the Boston Tea Party. When the first colonial appeal to arms was issued in 1775, Northampton County responded quickly on May 6 with the following summons:

"That the several townships in this county should associate and form themselves into companies, choose their proper officers, and provide each man one good fire lock, one pound powder, four pounds of lead, a sufficient quantity of flints, and a cartridge belt."

The Revolutionary War had begun. The men of Lynn Township responded. Burkhardt Mosser and Thomas Everett, members of Ebenezer Church, were members of one of the first county committees established to expedite the organization of companies of riflemen in the various townships. Christian Miller, another member of Ebenezer Church, served in the Second Pennsylvania Battalion which had been ordered to Canada in February, 1776.

Subsequent muster rolls up to the year 1781 included the names of other sons of Lynn Township and Ebenezer Church who gave their lives, horses, wagons, and other worldly possessions to help destroy the tyranny which threatened their freedom.

In the year 1790, one year after George Washington assumed his first term as president of the newly formed United States of America, representatives of Ebenezer Church drew up a plan to share a common parsonage with Jacob's Church and Bethel Church. However, sources indicate that this decision was not carried out because the land intended to be used was not for sale at the time.³

In a document dated 19 May 1798, there appear to be differences of opinion among the two congregations concerning how the church holidays are to be observed:

"Since differences have arisen in the union Ebenezer Church concerning the festive days or holidays which we are directed to observe, namely, New Year's Day, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Whitsunday, we the undersigned consistory of the Union Lutheran and Reformed congregations had a meeting and came to the following conclusions:

"Those of the above named holidays which fall on weekdays shall be observed under a special and separate rule and shall not be counted under the rule which governs Sundays, and each congregation shall have the same rights as the other alternately to the holidays as they arise. Should any of these days come on a Sunday, then the regular Sunday rule applies, under which no preacher is to interfere with the right of the other. However, should one of the preachers be unable to come or preach on his Sunday or holiday, there shall be nothing to prevent the other preacher from having church services on that day.

"This conclusion and amendment to the church by-laws was reached in hope that there may be peace and harmony among us.

"We ask you O God, for your assistance and blessing on this nineteenth day of May, 1798. In witness wherefore we have set our hands and seal.

/S/ Jacob Wertman

/S/ Michael Heilman

/S/ Jacob Hans

/S/ Burkhart Mosser

/S/ Peter Kirschner"

There are several sources which indicate the names of the ministers of both faiths who served the first church until 1798. Unfortunately, they are not consistent with one another, which is probably attributable to the fact that during the eighteenth century many ministers were not ordained but served as lay ministers. They were basically occupied in other trades and functioned

as ministers on a part-time basis. Many simply substituted. It was also quite common to serve four or five different congregations at the same time, moving about as a circuit-riding preacher.

The following rosters list the ministers of each faith in the order of probable succession:

Lutheran

Reformed

Daniel Schumacher

Philip Michael

George Young

Peter Miller

Herman Shellhart

Heinrich Hertzell

Daniel Lehman

Johannes Roth