

The Formative Years 1740? - 1760

The historical roots of Ebenezer Church are deeply implanted in the colonial period of our nation. It was during the 1730s and 1740s when large contingents of Reformed and Lutheran immigrants, the so-called "church people," migrated from Europe, predominantly the people from the German Palatinate region and Switzerland. Their destination was Pennsylvania and, more specifically, many chose an area which later was to become Lynn Township in the county of Northampton. Large numbers cleared the land and tilled the soil; others were engaged in various trades. However, they all shared one thing in common at the time. . . a harsh and often hostile, cruel pioneer life on the frontier of a new world. To this very day many parishioners of Ebenezer Church, who are the descendants of these early settlers, still retain many of their characteristics, customs, language, and accent.

It is not at all certain in what year the founders of Ebenezer Church began to assemble for purposes of worship. The Rev. William A. Helffrich, a former pastor of the church during the latter part of the nineteenth century, noted that it was in the decade of the 1740s, but he does not name a specific year. Others state that the founders first began congregating in 1740. If we assume the latter date to be valid, it is interesting to note that at that time Benjamin Franklin was already a well-known Philadelphia publisher; George Washington was a mere lad of eight years; Thomas Jefferson had not yet been born; and the Declaration of Independence was still thirty-six years into the future.

Since there were no established churches available to satisfy the spiritual needs and comfort of the devout pioneers, it became customary for them to gather on the Sabbath in someone's home, barn, or perhaps in the open, where one of the group would read Biblical passages from a devotional book, pray, and direct the singing of hymns.

According to one of the histories of Lehigh County we have the following quote:

"Where the road from Lynnville to the Blue Mountain crosses the Ontelaunee there stands a couple of hundred paces on the other side of the creek an old, weather boarded log house. This old house witnessed the origin and beginning of Ebenezer Church."

A man by the name of Peter Scholl, one of the prominent and most active founders of Ebenezer Church, resided in this house, probably between 1740 and 1750. The residence not only served as a place of worship, but also as a haven and refuge from the numerous Indian incursions taking place at the time. Reformed worshipers met in this house where Andrew Steiger, a schoolmaster, conducted services in lieu of a pastor. About the year 1745 the early worshipers agreed to build a church. However, construction of the first church did not take place until 1761.

It is not known exactly when Lutheran worshipers joined those of the Reformed faith. Charles H. Glatfelter, a church historian, informs us that both Lutheran and Reformed worshipers continued to meet in a house for some fifteen years. Therefore, we could conclude that those of the Lutheran faith became active as a congregation about 1745 to 1746.

Whether the Scholl home was used for worship until 1761 is debatable. There are indications that another meeting place for services was utilized. There is speculation that a block house had been erected on the former property of Burkhardt Mosser, approximately one mile south of the village of New Tripoli, close to the current road leading to the village of Lynnville.¹ Because of other relevant historical information at hand, we can assume that the structure was probably erected in the 1740s or 1750s. The block house served as a refuge from Indian raids. We further informed that:

"It was also used as a place of religious worship before the establishment of Ebenezer Church in 1761. Tradition states that the settlers met there at intervals for several years."

Thus, we can speculate that there may have been a change location of worship sometime during the late 1740s or early mid-1750s from the Scholl home to the block house.