

History Of Organ Evangelical Lutheran Church

(BY Z. A. KLUTTZ.)

It was away back in the dim, far distant past, about two hundred years ago, a generation before the Revolutionary War, when this section of country was but an immense wilderness, when there were no railroads, no steamboats, no roads, only Indian trails, when the country was inhabited by wild Indians, that our forefathers, in Pennsylvania, finding it difficult to secure farm-lands and houses at such prices as to them seemed possible to pay, gathered together their holdings, packed them into their scoop-bed wagons, and driving their herds of live stock, started out to find homes and farm-lands in the provinces of Virginia and North Carolina of which glowing reports had reached them.

Leaving Pennsylvania, they traveled down through Maryland, across the James River, up the beautiful Shenandoah valley of Virginia, and over the mountains into what is now known as the Piedmont section of North Carolina.

Today, the route that they traveled can easily be traced by the many Lutheran settlements along on either side of the way.

At that time there were no well-kept public highways with signboards directing the traveler on his way, but only Indian trails winding in and out, over hill and dale and through dense and dark forests, and often difficult to follow. Then, there were no bridges spanning the rivers and creeks, but each stream must be forded, and that, often where the ford was rough and rocky, and through deep and rushing waters, with high, precipitous banks on either side.

And not only were these natural difficulties to be overcome, but they were compelled to be constantly on the watch to guard against and repel the sudden attacks of the unfriendly Indians through whose territory they must pass.

Thus it was that our forefathers, through toils and labors, exposure and trials, difficulties and dangers, came to this section of North Carolina in which we are living today.

In the providence of God, here they came, a devout Spartan band; and here they settled "when the foundations of this grand old state of North Carolina were being laid; and here they organized their congregations and, side by side with their homes, erected their churches, trusting in God for pastors, though they knew not whence nor how they would come.

Thus, somewhere between the years of 1740 and 1745, the first three Lutheran churches were established; viz. St. Johns Church in Salisbury, Zion, now known as Organ Church in Rowan County, and St. Johns Church in Cabarrus, then Mecklenburg County. So far as can be ascertained, these three congregations were organized about the same time, that is somewhere about the year 1745, and very soon thereafter they erected their churches and held regular services, conducted by their church officers. But they had no pastor for more than twenty-five years.

Zion, known as Organ Church, is located in Rowan County, N. C., ten miles South from Salisbury, on the Mt. Pleasant road, seven miles West from Gold Hill and nine miles East of China Grove. The exact date of the organization of the congregation is not known, but, in all probability, was shortly after 1745, when those who organized it first came from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. The organization was effected more than one hundred and eighty years ago, and no doubt was the first Lutheran congregation ever organized in this Piedmont section of North Carolina. At the very lowest estimate Organ Church is one of the very oldest congregations in all this section of country; a landmark reaching away back before the Revolutionary War to the time of King George III, and embracing in its history from then until now many events with interest and importance.

Its first house of worship was located about seven miles from where Organ Church now stands, near where is now St. Peter's Church. It was constructed of hickory logs, and hence was called "Hickory Church," and was erected, owned, and used jointly by the Lutheran and German Reformed people. Just when this house was built we have no positive information, nor do we know for how many years they occupied it. The ground upon which it stood was never deeded to either church, and hence, when it became necessary to

make a change, they both abandoned it, and it was used no more by either. The house stood until it finally went to decay.

A large and costly granite monument has been recently erected by the members of St. Peter's Lutheran Church and dedicated as a memorial to mark the place of the first organized congregation and the first Lutheran church ever erected in North Carolina. This monument stands near the South West corner in St. Peter's cemetery, Rowan County, North Carolina.

The second house of worship was also a log church. It stood just back of the present building, and was used by the congregation until the new house was ready for occupancy. In this house Rev. Nussman, the first pastor, began his work and preached three years; here Rev. Arndt was ordained and preached ten years; and here Rev. Storch entered upon his labors and preached until they moved into the new house. Then for years the building was used for school purposes.

The third and present house of worship is a stone structure, 50x40 and two stories high. The old pulpit was gable-shaped with its sounding board overhead and built high up against the wall, with winding steps to ascend. It has long since been removed.

On three sides of the auditorium there is a capacious gallery with stairs leading up from either side. The present church building began in the year 1774 and finished in the year 1794. According to this they were twenty years in building it. And judging from the size of the house, and of the material of which it is built, they surely must have been that long if not longer.

The following members of our congregation began to build the so called Organ Church, viz: George Lewis Siffert, Wendel Miller, Peter Eddleman, John Stirewalt, Philip Cress, Peter Stirewalt, Michael Goodman, Christopher Pless, Leonard Siffert, Jacob Klein, Anthony Kuhn, George Henry Berges, Christapen Goodman, John Rendleman, John Eagle. They were all farmers, dependent upon their labors on the farm for their support, with none of modern labor saving machinery. They must therefore have devoted to the work of the building, only that part of the year that could best be spared from the farm. That, we know, wouldn't be but comparatively a short time in each year. The walls are built entirely of stone, not hewn or dressed stone, such as we use at the present day, but rough uncut stone, just as it was formed by nature. Where they procured this stone is a mystery, as there is none like it around here. They must have brought it from a considerable distance.

The floor, also was laid of large flat stones. In the gallery facing the pulpit stood for years and years, the old pipe organ, from which the church derives its popular name of "The Organ Church." It was built in the house entirely by hand, by a Mr. Stirewalt, a member of the congregation, and was one amongst the very first pipe organs ever built in America, and the first of any kind in any church in North Carolina. It possessed none of the external beauty and symmetry of the pipe organs of our day and time, but it was well adapted to its surroundings and the object for which it was made; and for long years its deep, majestic, solemn voice led the congregation in its service of praise; or wailed out its slow, heart-searching funeral dirge as the body of one after another of the people was carried out to the silent city of the dead. It gradually yielded to the inroads of time and use, growing each year weaker and weaker, until at length, its work was done. It has long since been removed from its old place in the gallery, and its parts have become broken and scattered. Many portions of it are carefully preserved as relics. The congregation has had made, from its

remains, many yard-sticks, that were eagerly sought for, and highly treasured in remembrance of the old organ.

In the year 1772, Organ Church of Rowan County, and St. John's Church of, then Mecklenburg, now Cabarrus County, after having no doubt, exhausted every effort to secure a pastor from the older settlements in Pennsylvania, determined to send a delegation to the fatherland, to appeal to their countrymen and brethren in the faith, to send them a pastor and school teacher; that they might have the Blessed Word preached to them, and that their children might be taught the things necessary for them to know. Accordingly Christopher Rintelmann, of Organ, and Christopher Layrely, of St. John's, two brave, strong, honest, consecrated men of God, representing sixty families, undertook the long and hazardous journey at their own expense. They were instructed to apply to the Consistory of Hannover, in preference to any other, because at that time the Province of North Carolina was under the government of the king of England, who, at the same time, was Elector of Hannover.

Supplied with the necessary credentials and especially with one from Governor Tryon who was, at that time, Governor of the Province of North Carolina, and with a letter of recommendation from him to the "Society for the spread of the Gospel in foreign parts," at London; the commissioners left their homes in 1772, traveled horseback to Charleston, South Carolina, made a safe voyage across the Atlantic and went, first, to England where they were most cordially received and kindly treated. The Missionary Society to which they appealed, heartily endorsed their cause. The king of England and numbers of the English noblemen gave liberally of their means, and St. James' Lutheran Chapel in London gave them a handsome sum of money for that day, in all amounting to more than eight hundred dollars.

In Germany they found the same hearty welcome awaiting them, where besides offering of money, they were presented with Bibles, hymn books, Catechisms and other publications; and to Organ church was presented with the following: viz. a baptismal bowl, platter, wine tankard, goblet and wafer box, constituting the first vessels of the kind ever owned and used by the congregation. These vessels have been in possession of the congregation now for one hundred and sixty-one years, and plainly indicate by their appearance the long term of their service.

For many years they were the only vessels used. Then they were set aside to be succeeded by a glass set which was used until an elegant silver set was purchased during the administration of Rev. W. R. Brown, later an individual communion set was presented to the congregation, which they are now using, by Mrs. Ellen Smith Lentz, in memory of her deceased husband, Mr. D. S. Lentz.

The congregation has in its possession today every communion vessel and every baptismal bowl that it has ever owned. Amongst these old relics is an old black bottle used for years and years for holding and keeping wine. How old it is no one knows. It no doubt came from the old country, and possibly was brought with the other vessels in 1773.

In the fall of 1773 the two commissioners, Christopher Lyerly and Christopher Rendleman, arrived in America with their pastor and school teacher.

The consistory of Hannover granted their petition for a pastor and a school teacher, and at once, officially called and commissioned the Rev. Adolphus Nussman as pastor and Mr. John Godfried Arndt as school teacher, and also, pledged the institution to serve the brethren in North Carolina in the future, by sending them additional ministers upon application.

What a blessed work those two laymen accomplished! God alone knows what might have become of the Lutheran church in North Carolina if those two had not volunteered to undertake the voyage to Europe. We of today should honor their memory as the preservers of Lutheranism in North Carolina.

Thus the Rev. Adolphus Nussman became the pioneer Lutheran minister of North Carolina. He was thirty-three old when he accepted the call to the Lutheran church in North Carolina.

Upon his arrival here in North Carolina, he at first, made his home in the vicinity of Organ church and served as pastor of that church and St. John's church in Salisbury, and occasionally visited and ministered to the spiritual needs of St. John church in Cabarrus County. The school teacher, Mr. Arndt, taught the children of Organ church for two years, and was then ordained to the Gospel Ministry, and became the second pastor of Organ church, the Rev. Nussman removing to Cabarrus County and becoming the pastor of St. John church in that county, which he served faithfully and well until his death, November 8, 1794. His earthly remains lie in the old graveyard of St. John church.

Rev. Arndt was the first Lutheran Minister ever ordained in North Carolina, and the second pastor of Organ church. He served that congregation for eleven years and then removed to Lincoln County. He was one of the organizers of the North Carolina Synod and was its first president.

The ministerial life and history of this church is, indeed, remarkable. In its history it seems to have been vacant but one year. It has had twenty different pastors, whose names and time of service are as follows:

Rev. Adolphus Nussman 1773-1774, 1 year.
 Rev. Gottfried Arndt, 1775-1785, 10 years.
 Rev. Adolphus Nussman, 1785-1787, 2 years.
 The church was now vacant for one year, and was visited occasionally by Rev. Gottfried Arndt.
 Rev. C. A. G. Storch, 1788-1823, 35 years.
 Rev. Daniel Scherer, 1823-1829, 6 years.
 Rev. Jacob Kaempfer, 1829-1832, 3 years.
 Rev. Henry Graeber, 1832-1834, 11 years.
 Rev. Samuel Rothbrock, 1844-1866, 22 years.
 Rev. W. H. Cone, Jan 1, 1866-May 1, 1866, 4 months.
 Rev. William Artz, May 1, 1866.
 Rev. Samuel Rothrock July 1, 1868-Jan. 1, 1869, 6 months.
 Rev. S. Scherer and W. H. Cone, 1869-1870, 1 year.
 Rev. W. H. Cone, Jan. 1, 1866-May 1, 1873, 3 years, 4 months.
 Rev. W. R. Ketchie, June 1873-June 1874, 1 year.
 Rev. P. A. Stroble, Jan. 1, 1874-Oct. 1, 1875, 1 year, 9 months.
 Rev. Samuel Rothrock, Jan. 1, 1876-Jan. 1, 1886, 10 years.
 Rev. W. R. Brown, July 1, 1886-Jan. - 1894, 8 years.
 Rev. G. H. Cox, 1894-1904, 10 years.
 Rev. C. A. Brown, 1904-1907, 4 years.
 Rev. H. A. Trexler, 1908-1913, 6 years.
 Rev. R. R. Sowers, Jan. 1, 1914-April 30, 1918, 4 years 4 months.
 Rev. L. L. Lohr, Nov. 1, 1918-April 15, 1919, 5 1/2 months.
 Rev. M. L. Ridenhour, May 1, 1919-May 1, 1923, 3 years.
 Rev. P. L. Miller, Sept. 1, 1922-12 years.

During the troubles of 1878-1879, which resulted in the organization of the Tennessee Synod in 1820, Organ congregation came in for its full share. Party spirit ran very high between what was then called the "Henkelites" and the "Lutherans." Both parties sought to hold possession of the old church, and were not very scrupulous as to the measures or means used.

On one occasion a communion meeting was in progress in Old Organ church. Services were held on Saturday and while progressing one of the "Henkelites" slipped the key from the door of the church, hastily pressed it against his bare wrist, thereby taking an impression, from which he quickly whittled in pine bark a pattern; that night he made a key.

Sometime during the night "Henkelites" gathered at the church, expecting with the key to open the door and take possession of the house and keep the "Lutherans" out. But, alas, the key would not turn in the lock. In the eagerness to force it they put a stick through the ring of the key to act as a lever; but the ring burst and they failed.

The next morning they gathered with the congregation; and when the communion services were ended refused to leave the house. Thereupon a fierce struggle, which resulted in the forcible ejection of the "Henkelites" from the building. Some were by physical strength forced out of the doors, while others were taken up bodily and thrown out of the windows.

The speaker was told when he was only a young boy, by an ex-slave, Sam Propst, that he was present at Organ church when the above occasion took place.

When the "Lutherans" and the "Henkelites" separated, they divided a part of their sacramental utensils between them. I am, to-day, returning to the congregation of Organ church a pewter communion cup, and a Baptismal pan, which was given to the Henkelites when they made the separation. These vessels, I was told, was brought along with the first vessels from Germany. These utensils were presented to me to be given to Organ church, by a former member, whose good parents belonged to the "Henkelites."

The original deed for the land upon which the old Organ church building now stands is dated August 16, 1786. It was given by Mr. Ludwig Siffert "To the Elders and Trustees and their successors in office, for the Lutheran Congregation belonging to the Second Creek Organ Meeting house." The deed calls for "Ten acres including the said meeting house, school house and other buildings thereunto belonging," for which is acknowledged the receipt of "Five pounds, good and lawful money of North Carolina."

The title of land is traced back through the following parties, it being a part of a tract of land containing seven hundred and one acres of land to Ludwig Siffert from Thomas Frohock and William Frohock in the year 1777, whose right preceded from William McCulloch in the year 1766, whose right preceded from Hugh Montgomery in the year 1762, whose right preceded from David Jones, sheriff of Rowan County in the year 1758.

From this title deed we learn something interesting to consider.

First. They erected the house before they had any right or title to the land upon which it now stands. Such a proceeding at the present day would be very much out of the ordinary, and would be undertaken by very few. It shows how honest conscientious those old-time people were, as well as the entire confidence they had in each other.

Second. This deed gives us an approximate date for the old organ; because the church was never known as Organ church until the organ was placed in it.

The second parcel of land sold to Organ church dated September 10, 1789, from John Rintelmann and his wife, Margaret Rintelmann, to the Lutheran Congregation belonging to the Second Creek Organ Meeting House, containing ten acres, the consideration being five pounds.

Organ church now owns thirty and nine-tenths acres of land, most of which is in natural forests. The parsonage of Organ church was built in the year 1887, during the administration of Rev. W. R. Brown. It is a neat frame building containing six rooms, and is finished in good style and excellent taste both inside and out. It stands upon a beautiful and commanding elevation overlooking the church.

This together with the necessary out-buildings, makes a pleasant and convenient home for the pastor.

The Centennial celebration of Organ church was held on Sunday, May 6, 1894. The exercises of the celebration of the centennial were held in the beautiful grove surrounding the church. A stand had been erected under one of the large oaks, and seats arranged in front. The church was totally inadequate to accommodate the large concourse of people assembled on this occasion. The crowd was estimated at from 3,000 to 5,000.

Rev. Samuel Rothrock, D. D. had charge of the exercises in the forenoon. He had not been well and was rather feeble but could not forego the pleasure of being present on this joyous occasion. His voice was clear and distinct. The old familiar hymn, "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name," was sung with power and expression by the congregation.

Rev. W. R. Ketchie, a former pastor, read the 46th Psalm, and prayer by Rev. M. G. G. Scherer, D. D.

An address on the history of Organ church was delivered by Rev. G. D. Bernheim, D. D. At the close of Dr. Bernheim's address the choir sang with powerful effect, "My Church, My Church, My Dear Old Church," and an intermission for dinner was taken.

In the afternoon the exercises were conducted by Rev. W. A. Lutz and prayer by Rev. H. M. Brown.

An address was given by Rev. F. W. E. Peschan, D. D., prayer by Rev. L. K. Probst, secretary of the board of missions of the United Synod.

Before the congregation was dismissed Rev. Lutz suggested that we gather around the grave of Rev. C. A. G. Storch, whose remains are buried in the cemetery adjoining the church. Dr. Rothrock was present at the grave and the Apostle's Creed and Lord's Prayer were repeated in concert. After this one stanza of "Nearer My God to Thee," was sung and Dr. Rothrock pronounced the benediction.

The leader of the choir was Mr. William Fesperman. The organists were Miss Daisy Kluttz and Miss Mattie Holshouser.

The members in the choir were Misses Mary C. Holshouser, Mary Lee Miller, Abby C. Cox, Alice Kluttz, Effie Kluttz, Katie Beaver, Eudora Bost, Nettie Barger, Elizabeth Fesperman, Cora Bost, Joan Smith, Ellen Holshouser, Ellen Smith, Laura Harris, Jennie Fesperman, and C. Brown Cox, L. A. Holshouser, Milo Kluttz, James Bost, G. O. Kluttz, Z. A. Kluttz, L. L. Fesperman, D. M. Barger, H. L. Barger, W. F. Josey, E. W. Cox, John L. Miller and George L. Brown.

On November 18, 1906, at the close of the meeting of the Southern Conference of North Carolina Synod, the stately and beautiful tower and bell recently built and placed by the Organ Congregation to the old historic Organ Evangelical Lutheran church, at a cost of \$1,378.94, was dedicated to the service of the Lord by Rev. G. H. Cox, D. D., president of the North Carolina Synod, also the old church was renovated and beautified to the amount of \$279.27, making \$1,658.21 the total cost of improvement, Rev. C. A. Brown being the pastor.

In 1927 Organ Congregation became self-supporting, the present pastor, Rev. Paul L. Miller, to be the first all time pastor.

The Organ Congregation began to hold annual home coming in the summer of 1923.

The home coming in 1923 marked the 178th anniversary of the congregation, the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first pastor, and the 149th anniversary of the laying of the foundation of the present church building.

In the year 1928 Organ Church congregation erected a modern two story Sunday school building at a total cost of about ten thousand dollars. The building is built of rough granite to correspond with the old church building. The Park brothers furnishing free hauling of the granite and sand.

The laying of the cornerstone about the front door was on May 20th, 1929.

The building was first used for Sunday school on Sunday, December 1, 1929. The present Sunday school Supt. is Mr. Ethan Shive, Hollie Ritchie, assistant Supt., and Clyde Siffert, secretary and treas.

The number of members of Organ Church Congregation is 525 members.

The writer is greatly indebted for the above history from the well preserved German Record Book of Organ Church, which was translated into the English language by the Rev. G. D. Bernheim, D. D., and the Rev. A. G. Voit, D. D., also from the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Ministerium of North Carolina by the Rev. G. D. Bernheim, D. D., and the Rev. G. H. Cox, D. D., and from the history of the beginning of the Lutheran church in North Carolina by Rev. G. H. Cox, D. D.

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The number of members of Organ church Sunday school is 350 members.

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