

Zion's Stone Valley Church

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This, at one time, was known as the Gap Church, probably, because it is located near the main gap through Fisher's Ridge. Through this gap were the main trails, from and through, Mahantango valley, northward and westward through Stone valley. Fisher's ridge divides these two valleys. I gather from the Northumberland county court records, that on March 25, 1779, at a private session of court, a petition was presented, praying: a road be laid out and constructed from Stonebaker's mill through lands of John Chobb to the Gap Church. Stonebaker's mill was in Upper Paxton township, Lancaster county, now Dauphin county, on the south side of Mahantango creek, about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the mouth of this creek, at the Susquehanna river. John Chobb's land was on the north side of this creek, about one and one-half miles from the river, and on a rather direct course to the Gap Church about two miles distant. That trade and commerce were some reasons for the road petition is obvious, but a greater reason, duty, comes into being. This was, then, the only church in this part of Mahanoy township, now Lower Mahanoy township. The settlers were hungry for the preached word, as it was their custom, before coming here, to assemble on a Sabbath at some house of worship, or at some private house, to worship. But it was the duty of the earnest members of the two congregations to attend services on a Sabbath.

I said the main trails went through this gap. Today four good township or dirt roads converge here, on the Mahantango valley side, to go north and west; and on the

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north or Stone valley side, there are five close by to go south through this Gap. The site was "pleasant for situation," as for trails, water was handy, and the stone and wood for building was close by. According to Bell's History of Northumberland County, page 744, "In 1855 the Trevorton, Mahanoy and Susquehanna Railroad, was opened, making connection with the Pennsylvania Canal, on the west side of the Susquehanna river by bridging this river at Trevorton Junction, now Herndon." I had from good authority, that many of the stones used in the building of the bridge piers, were transported by flat boat from Georgetown, now Dalmatia, to the bridge site by a resident, Peter Burrell, of Georgetown. The stone were quarried on the land of Gap Church, and conveyed by land carriage to the river about two miles away.

I have reason to believe, that many of the early settlers, in this region were squatters, in a sense, and that the first building for school and church purposes was erected through the connivance of the "Friendly Association" "for regaining and preserving peace with the Indians by pacific measures," which "was formed by the Friends in 1756 for the purpose of bringing Quaker influences to bear on the adjustment of the Indian difficulties. Its necessity was deemed apparent because the executive of the province had disregarded the universal, peaceful and just policy followed by Penn, and the Friends hoped to restore it in an unofficial way." "Though without official standing and unrecognized by the Proprietors and Governors, the association performed much useful service. Its work was done through conferences and by presents of money and merchandise and several important treaties were made largely through its influence, especially with Tedyuscung, the celebrated king of the Delaware Indians." (Paragraph number 36, Pennsylvania: A Primer). While we have no definite record, for or against, there may have been a "sod and twig" transfer

for much of the land in the present Lower Mahanoy township.

Later, after the settlers had become more prosperous, in various ways, they redeemed their lands from the State, mainly through warrants, and thereby secured a good title to their holdings.

I surmise that many of these early settlers here were redemptioners or indentured servants, and differed from serfs only in that their services were limited and self imposed. "It was by copying the autographed lists and commenting on them that Rupp made up his valuable book, 'Thirty Thousand Names of German Immigrants.' As we turn its pages and read the entries of the vessels and other details, we seem to be brought nearer to this old German immigration, and realize more fully its meaning.

"The condition in which the immigrants reached Philadelphia was shocking. The ships were floating hospitals and pest-houses, filled with small-pox and all the other diseases of crowding, and with the dirt which gathered frightful intensity from the voyage of two or three months. One ship reached the coast after a voyage of six months, with the surviving passengers living on rats and vermin. Vessels often lost, on their passage, one third of their human freight, and one ship is said to have arrived after having lost two hundred and fifty. Sauer said that in one year two thousand of the Germans had died in crossing the Atlantic, and this estimate does not seem to be excessive. The delays in the voyage were numerous. Before reaching the ship the people had to pass through thirty or forty custom houses on the Rhine, at each of which they were delayed several days, so that this Rhine journey usually consumed five or six weeks, and completely exhausted their slender stock of supplies and money.

After delays of five or six weeks occurred at the seaports, the poor immigrants, starving and desperate, sold themselves as redemptioners to the captains and shipping

agents." Mittleberger, in his 'Journey to Pennsylvania in 1750' has described what they suffered on the voyage: "In Rotterdam and Amsterdam they begin to pack the people in like herring, and since the ships insist on carrying not less than four, five, six hundred souls, besides enormous cargoes of household utensils, chests, water-casks and provisions, many were obliged to occupy berths scarcely two feet wide by six long" "It is not, however, till the ship has raised its anchor for the last time and started on its eight, nine, or even twelve week's sail for Philadelphia that the greatest misery is experienced. Then there are heart-rendering scenes: the filth and stench of the vessels no pen could describe, while the divers diseases, sea-sickness in every form, headaches, biliousness, constipation, dysentery, scarlet fever, scrofula, cancers, etc., caused by the miserable salt food and the vile drinking water are truly deplorable. Not to speak of the death which occur on every side. The sufferings of the poor women who are pregnant can scarcely be imagined. They rarely live through the voyage, and many a mother with her tiny baby is thrown into the water almost ere life is extinct. During a severe storm on our vessel one poor creature who, owing to the trying circumstances, was unable to give birth to her child, was shoved through an opening in the ship and allowed to drop into the water, because it was not convenient to attend her."

"The Quakers were obliged to provide for the immigrants and prepare hospitals to receive them, and the physicians who made Philadelphia famous as a center of medical education gained some of their first experience this way." The foregoing was about the experience of the German emigration till 1770 and even later. The church people as they were called, Reformed and Lutherans, were for the most part disconnected and irregular in their migrations, and had to be afterwards organized with much difficulty by Rev. Michael Schlatter for the Reformed, and Rev.

Henry Melchior Muhlenberg for the Lutherans. These German immigrants, after being released at Philadelphia, started for the interior: Lancaster, Lebanon, Berks, Montgomery, Bucks, and Lehigh counties. Many of them had relatives and friends among those that had come on before. As these counties became crowded or more thickly settled, these new comers often went on farther into the wilderness, so that several counties were organized just prior to the Revolutionary war. This county, Northumberland, was organized in 1772. That there was a considerable population, in these and surrounding parts is evident from the minutes of the Provincial council. At a council held in Philadelphia on Saturday 30th of January, 1768, the Hon. John Penn, Esq., Lieutenant Governor, Benjamin Crew, Lynford Lardner, and James Tilghman, Esquires, among other business, the governor laid before the board a petition from a very considerable number of the inhabitants of Berks county, that if a Provincial Road were to be laid out, in the most convenient places, from the town of Reading in the said county, to Fort Augusta, it would greatly tend to advance the trade and commerce with the Indians, who are settled at the heads of the Susquehanna river. The road was to be laid out as far as the land had been purchased, or to the line of junction of the Susquehanna river and Mahanoy creek. Jonas Seely, John Patton, Henry Christ, James Scull, Frederick Weiser, Benjamin Sypcker, Mark Bird, Christian Lauer, and Thomas Jones, Jr., or any six, to lay out and return the courses and distances within six months. (Col. Rec. vol 9, page 440). A return of the board to lay out road from Reading to Fort Augusta, was made in 1769. In following the different stations, we come across some land marks that have great historical value, thus: station 63, Ft. Henry; station 74, on the ridge of Kittatinny mountain; near station 104, the old path to Liken's valley; station 141, to Spread Eagle, (Spread Eagle Manor now) the meeting point in the boundaries of Nor-

thumberland, Schuylkill, and Dauphin counties); station 142, Mahantango creek; station 156, to a branch of Swober creek; station 179, Maghonnay creek; and station 180, to a white oak on the bank of the Susquehanna river, and south side of Mahannioy mountain. The return was signed by Jonas Seely, John Patton, Frederick Weiser, Benjamin Sypcker, Christian Lauer, and Thomas Jones, Jr. The return was confirmed by the board and declared to be the King's Highway, or public road and to be rendered commodious for public service.

Two stations on this plotting, stations 104 and 141, are valuable to us at present. At about station 104, a path led off to the left, about west, called the old path to Liken's valley. This path came through what we now know as William's valley and by the side of the present town of Lykens. This path or trail followed the base of Short mountain, thence about northwest to the gap in Mahantango mountain, where the town of Pillow, now is. Here at Pillow, or nearby, several trails branched off; one to the right followed Mahantango creek east northeast to Spread Eagle; one to the left followed Mahantango creek, west southwest to the Susquehanna river. One trail led almost due north through the fourth gap of Fisher's ridge to what we know as Mandata and followed Fiddler's run to the Susquehanna river.

Several trails branched off the second and third trails, followed small runs and intersected with the Small Cut. This run heads on the east of the church land, in an adjoining field, turns south and enters Mahantango creek, where the Lenker family had settled. These trails were followed by the early pioneer settlers of Lower Mahanoy township. Station 142, Mahantango creek, about 14 miles from the Susquehanna river, along the creek, from this point various trails or paths branched off, across Hoofland, etc. to now Red Cross, or Schwaben creek region. It is true a trail followed the Susquehanna river on the east side, from Fort

Hunter, near Dauphin, Pennsylvania, to what was Shamokin or Fort Augusta. But this trail was not as convenient as the overland trail through and across Lykens valley into Mahantango valley. That there was a considerable population, we can gather from "Donohoo's Indian Villages and Place Names in Pennsylvania," page 103, under Mahantango; "After the commencement of Indian hostilities in 1755, Captain Thomas McKee was authorized to get such supplies as were needed for the defense of the settlers, at Fort Hunter, six miles above Harrisburg." We must remember Captain McKee had a trading post at what is now Dalmatia as early as 1742; and that he had other than Indian helpers is believed, and that he relied on the aid of the various white squatters in the interior, is also possible. Why should he be authorized to gather supplies for an expedition or aid of settlers, unless he had the aid and assistance of others besides the Indians. This settlement was not effected in a day, or a month, but years. What stupendous labor was expended in the achievement, every thing was done in a primitive way. The first care was a shelter from wild beasts and the elements, temporary at first, until such time that the great trees could be felled, hewn on two parallel sides notched and saddled at the ends so that they would fit together. After several men went together to raise a shelter and help each other to build a home. A saw, a broad axe, a cutting axe, a frow and an auger were about the only tools used until later. Glazed windows were not thought of, because of the danger and expense. A hide tanned thin was stretched over an opening and often a block of wood was inserted, because of the danger from the Indians. Hand made nails were expensive, so, very few were used. Instead of shingles, there were oak, reaved clapboards, six or eight inches wide, and three or four feet long, held in place by a rider or binder, pinned to the rafter and cave logs, by wooden pins. These clapboards were lapped on the ends and on one side. Each

vertical row would form a gutter for the water to run off. The early cabins and larger houses were built quite near or over a spring, and many had port holes for defense against Indians. After the shelters were constructed, the newcomers turned their attention to clearing the land. A very primitive plow was fashioned from the forks of a tree, or in the absence of beasts of burdens, the men and boys had a heavy hoe or mattox, and prepared the ground for seed: rye, corn, flax, and a few vegetables, for of necessity they were flesh eaters. They shot game in the forest or caught fish in the streams.

After the first scant crops were garnered, living became a little easier, but there was work for all. Mother and the girls took care of the flax and wool, fashioning their clothing. The hum of the large wool wheel—and the fainter whine of the spinning wheel, and the clank of the loom, could be heard in nearly every home. Father and the boys were equally busy clearing the land, opening the trails, splitting rails, helping the neighbours hew logs for a house or barn. And perhaps father was a shoe maker or wood worker, or had some other useful trade.

In the lower counties of Pennsylvania, especially near Philadelphia, churches and schools were started at an early date. Often they were served by men sent by Schlatter or Muhlenberg, a clerk, a catechist, or a licentiate, and while some were regular ordained ministers to a certain degree, yet they were not regularly installed pastors. The circuit rider here comes into play, and that all were good men and true, and made an honest endeavor, I will not deny. Call them all circuit riders if you will, these men going from home to home, from meeting place to meeting place. They heard that there were still others along such another trail, perhaps a day or two days journey. These men reporting to their superiors, were sent on these longer journeys, or perhaps some one else was sent to find and minister to the spiritual wants in the hinterland. That these were brave

and courageous men you must admit, for these were troublesome times, no good highways, not many settlers, and perhaps lurking Indians, or ferocious animals in forests all about.

Mounted on a horse, with his saddle bags, or Stwarie-Sock behind him, I doubt whether he carried a gun. Eventually he arrived at his destination. I believe he was received and welcomed to the best that the settlers afforded. That the early Moravian Missionaries sometimes had services here, I do believe. "Count Zinzendorf and Conrad Weiser came along the trail on the east side of the Susquehanna river in 1742 and named Mahantango creek, 'Benigna's creek,' in honor of his daughter." (Memorials of the Moravian Church, 81, 1870.)

"In 1748 Bishop Cammerhoff, on his way to Shamokin, Jan. 13, came to Thomas McKee's, the last white settlement on the river below Shamokin." (Cammerhoff's Journal, Pennsylvania Magazine of History, 1905.) That others of this creed came, and stopped, I believe, for in many of the lower counties it was done and why not here.

That Lutheran and Reformed circuit riders sowed good seed is evident. They did what they could. They made their circuits during the months that the trails were passable, or the weather permitted. During the winter there was hardly any service, or visit from the rider until after more settlers had located at or near the trails. For his services in the more populated sections the regular pastor received as high as two hundred dollars a year, for teaching and preaching. The circuit rider in the outlying sections received perhaps a hank of spun wool, or enough spun flax to make a yard of cloth, a saddle of venison or a tanned deer side, as the settlers had very little money to give, but what they had to give they gave freely. The tanned deer hides were very useful for bedding and articles of clothing, and those tanned with the hair on, by putting

the hair side in, were made into packets and breeches for winter use.

Thus many of the early churches were started. A handful here and there, a zealous exhorter, and a will to serve the Lord, were the foundations upon which many Lutheran and Reformed churches were organized in the hinterland.

The exact date of the organization of this church cannot at present be ascertained. Let me quote from the Lutheran Ministerium of the Danville Conference: "Zion's Stone Valley. The organization of this congregation, which is looked upon and respected as the Mother Church of the other three (Dalmatia, Pillow and Vera Cruse) dates back prior to the year 1775. This organization was effected as far as is known by Rev. Wolf. There was occasional preaching and the administration of the Sacraments as early as 1750; probably by such men who had been sent by Rev. H. M. Muhlenberg, the Patriarch of our Lutheran Zion in this western world." With the organization of this church, we cannot omit the labors of the Rev. John Michael Enterline, who "was a native of the Palatinate, Germany, where he was born in 1726. He was educated at Leipsic and ordained a minister in 1751. He emigrated to America about 1760, but to what locality is not known. He became pastor of what subsequently was organized as St. John's congregation near Berryburg, Pennsylvania. He was a faithful minister of the Gospel. He died March 6, 1800, aged 74 years, leaving a wife, Anna Barbara, and children, John Michael, John Paul, Daniel, Anna Mary married John Adam Lenker, and Elizabeth married Henry Wert. Many of his descendants are living in this vicinity." (Egle's History of Dauphin County). And from "The Lutheran Ministerium Jubilee Book," we have that Rev. Enterline was married Nov. 1, 1760, came to America in 1769, was pastor at Indian Field, and find him at Hammelstown in 1771. He settled in Lykens Valley Oct. 6, 1773. It is supposed he

served in Schuylkill, Northumberland, Dauphin and Snyder counties." That he preached here is believed, as he was the only Lutheran minister in these parts for a long time.

The first church edifice was probably built prior to the time of the organization of the congregation, for church and school purposes. It was but a small building, probably twenty by thirty feet. It was built of logs and situated in the lower part of the old portion of the burial ground. In the year 1796 the erection of the second church edifice was commenced, its completion was not effected until the year 1802. After the organizations were effected and a house of worship erected, the congregation took steps toward procuring an unoccupied tract of land which lay close by, in fact was already occupied by a burial ground and a log building used for church and school purposes.

In the year 1808 an application was made to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and a grant was given to Adam Lenker, Lutheran, and John Bingeman, Reformed, trustees. The tract as now owned by the two congregations, contains 65 acres and 93 perches, and is used for burial purposes and for the support of the organist. The price paid was \$153. And from Bell's History of Northumberland County, about page 711; "The Stone Valley Lutheran and Reformed church was originally known under the name of Christian Unity, and it is supposed that public worship and the administration of the Sacraments were begun as early as 1765. The first church building was of log, twenty feet by thirty feet. The second was erected in 1796 by Jacob Thani." Could we gather the early church records of both congregations what a wealth of family names we would see, many that are quite familiar to us today for many descendants of those early settlers are living in these parts; such names as: Adams, Lenker, Boyer, Brosius, Babb, Clark, Doney, Emerick, Fisher, Fox, Harris, Heckert, Lauer, Moyer, Philips, Rothermel, Shaffier, Sny-

der, Tschopp, Wirt, Witmer, Zerby and many others.

There is a long list of Lutheran pastors commencing with Rev. Wolf, Rev. Adams, and Rev. Samsel. How long they served, or whether they were merely supplies is not known. The Rev. J. C. Walker from about 1806 to 1809. The Rev. Daniel Ulrich from 1809 to 1811. The Rev. John P. Shindel from 1815 to 1830 or 31. The Rev. Joseph N. Hempling from 1831 to 1850. The Reverends C. F. Welden and Nathan Yeager from 1850 to 1853. The Rev. F. Walz from Jan. 1, 1854 to Jan. 1, 1865. The Rev. Jeremiah Shindel from 1865 until the time of his death March 1870. In 1844 the Rev. J. L. Leis served the Reformed congregation. This is the first Reformed pastor that I have record of at present. There were others on both sides, down to the present time. That the Lutheran and Reformed lived and worshipped amicably together we can gather from various sources. In volume 40, of the Pennsylvania German Society Publication, page 38, we find the following: "In as much as the Lutheran Church, as well as the Reformed, was interested in education, and since the State did not provide the schools, it was but natural for the church to assume the responsibility as far as its members were concerned. It, the church, discharged this duty until the advent of the public school system." Again, page 170, "The Lutheran and Reformed people came from the same Fatherland, spoke the same language, cherished the same hopes, observed the same social customs, braved the same dangers, and endured the same hardships. There was but little difference in their religious. For a long time these two groups of people were practically one." "Lutheran and Reformed pastors preached to the same people on alternate Sundays, in the same church. Inter-marriage also helped to unite these people. When they built a church, it was natural for them to build a union church." Again page 172, "Dr. Schmucker says, "Each congregation formed in Pennsylvania, established a congregation school along