

EARLY RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THIS CITY

Paper on Zion Church by Prof. Wert Has Bearing as Historical Document

IS OF GENERAL LOCAL INTEREST

Harrisburg Historian Tells of Conditions in State and City Which Influenced Particularly the Lutheran and Reformed Sects

A paper on "The Founding and Early History of Zion Lutheran Church" was read last night at a meeting of the Men of Zion by Prof. J. Howard Wert, is of considerable local interest, reviewing as it does the early religious history of Pennsylvania and more particularly of Harrisburg. With the description of the growth of Zion Lutheran church is woven an account of contemporary events, which gives the paper an important bearing as a historical document. The text, complete, is as follows:

From very soon after the settling of Pennsylvania down to the present time the German element has been the most potent factor in the upbuilding of our State. To it we owe much of the solidity of growth, prosperity and development, first of the colony and then of the Commonwealth.

In 1677 William Penn visited Germany. He saw the poverty and misery left by the Thirty Years' war, and his great heart commiserated. Four years later he received his grant of Pennsylvania from the English King. He immediately wrote to Germany, recommending his new colony as an asylum for oppressed sects and a home for those who desired to better hard conditions. Emigration societies were formed. The first company, led by Francis Daniel Pastorius, sailed in the Concord, a name which should rank with the Mayflower, and reached Philadelphia October 8, 1682, settling in Germantown. These people signed the first anti-slavery petition in America.

The German Population in Pennsylvania. From that time on the German emigration to Pennsylvania continued in a steady flow that has made our Commonwealth more than any other State of the Union, a German one.

The greatest number came from the Palatinate on the Rhine. Many of them came as "redeemers"; that is, through poverty, they were obliged to sell their services for a term of years to secure a passage to the new land of promise. Some of the ablest and most distinguished men of our State, from the time of the Revolution down to the present, have been the descendants of these poverty-stricken, but hardy, industrious and religious "redeemers."

The cold winter of 1708-9, which destroyed the vines and fruit trees over large areas of Germany, drove 15,000 to England. Some thousands colonized in Ireland; 5,000 came on to the land of Penn. From 1719 to 1729 the Dutch and other Baptist sects of Germany came to Pennsylvania in large numbers, founding Ephrata and other towns. In 1733 one of these German denominations settled along the Perkiomen. In 1741 Count Zinzendorf established the Moravian settlements in Pennsylvania, which developed into the towns of Bethlehem, Nazareth and others.

But the great stream of German emigration of those connected with the Lutheran and German Reformed Churches far surpassed that of all other sects. The history of these two denominations is closely intertwined in the first century of our State's existence.

How the Lutheran and German Reformed Churches Were Lined Together. Not only were these two churches of cognate German origin, but, in all essentials of Christian faith, the followers of Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli held the same points of doctrine. Theirs had been common sufferings and persecutions. The two churches mentioned ran along lines so identical and were so interlinked by many ties of consanguinity that they readily and naturally coalesced in church matters. Hence the great majority of the originally constructed church edifices were union buildings, in which each of these denominations had an interest.

This union of effort in church-building was a result of primitive conditions. To our forefathers of a century and a half, or even a century ago, even at the best, life was a long, hard struggle for existence. For many years after the Revolution money was scarce, and it required here-lean and persistent efforts to obtain the means of erecting the humblest places of worship.

National life developed into more independent lines of action. Yet, as a general rule, so harmonious were the relations of the joint owners of the German churches that, in many cases, the union arrangement was continued long after the financial necessity for it had ceased to exist.

The Intense Religious Life of the Early German Population. Let it be remarked in passing, that, above everything else the German element that settled in Pennsylvania was an intensely religious people. Agnostics, infidels, freethinkers were so completely unknown to them that there was no word in their original vernacular to express persons of that class.

In every German family, at a stated time, morn and eve, all work was dropped and children, guests, hired laborers—all within the household were assembled around the head of the house, who took down the ponderous family Bible which was an essential in every home and read from it, with reverent awe, as a preliminary to family prayer in which God's guidance was sought and His blessing invoked.

Baptism, confirmation, first communion, marriage were joyous, yet solemn milestones in life, blended with touching religious ceremonies and elaborately recorded in quaint certificates which adorned the walls of humble, yet happy homes.

The faith of those olden time German folk who, in work and prayer, laid deep and broad the foundations of

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entertained in the homes of the Harrisburg Membership. How Our Forefathers Went to Church. In those early days, when the sparse population was widely scattered and churches were far apart, Sunday was a real letter day of the calendar to the toiling yeoman. Then the hard toils of the week were thrown aside for a day of rest, and humble folk, in their best homespun garb, wended their way, past farm and clearing and through mighty forests, for many weary miles, to reach the nearest house of worship. The well-to-do farmer and his family went horseback or in some rude conveyance of the farm, for carriages were then an unknown luxury. But the great mass were obliged to travel on foot, often a distance of ten miles or more, to the nearest tabernacle of God.

But no one, no matter how poor or how lowly, ever came to these rural churches of the olden time that he did not receive a royal welcome from the brethren living near the edifice who vied with each other to see who could obtain the greatest number of the brethren from a distance to accompany him home for dinner. Meantime, at homes near by, one or more families of the family, in each, were preparing a banquet for a King. 'Tis said that the custom in the old German churches, which is still maintained, I think, in St. Michael's church, on State street, of ringing the bell about the conclusion of the sermon, had its origin, principally, in the desire to notify the folks at home that their guests of the day would soon arrive. It is quite likely that such is the case for this was an era when time-pieces like many other conveniences of our modern life, were not a very plentiful article.

How the Visiting Brethren Were Entertained:

Well, did the Brethren from a distance who were urged and importuned "to go along for dinner" get anything to eat? Did people live in those days? I rather guess, True, the folks of a hundred years ago were a trifle short on fashion, but they made it up in grub. The Susquehanna and every tributary stream abounded in fish, or you could drive down to Havre de Grace and buy a two-horse wagon load of the finest shad for what you now pay in our markets for one disreputable, slab-sided specimen.

The hogs ran wild in the woods in droves and fed on acorns. And that pork they produced was fit for an emperor. None of your flabby, insipid Chicago stuff from diseased swine bloated upon rotten refuse brewery mash. Oh! the hams, the sausages, the puddings of that period as they came on every farm and village table! You imagine that never tasted them don't know what living is. Each farmer and well-to-do denizen of the olden time towns killed one or more hives annually. Those animals were from the fresh meadows, now hauled two thousand miles packed in cans, like sardines in a box, till crazed from thirst and brutal prodding.

And game! Don't talk! There were deer and rabbits; pheasants and partridges; possums and coons; squirrels and wild pigeons, wild turkeys, wild geese, and what not! And not a game law or a game warden in all the broad State.

Yes the streams were alive with fish, the wide forests alive with game, whilst beaver and otter basked in the sunlight amid the mad of Paxton creek and every other little affluent of the Susquehanna.

Did the rural dames of that period and their buxom daughters know how to prepare these and a hundred other things from farm and forest? Golden apples and golden pumpkins alike furnished luscious pies. And the cakes, the tarts, the jams, the jellies, the preserves! The midsummer berries that grew luxuriantly in the fields and thickets, the nuts of autumn gathered by the farmer boys by the bushel—all were called on to add sweet viands to loaded tables. But I've written myself hungry, and I'll stop. I'd like you all to see one of those country dinner tables of a hundred years ago. I would like to sit down to one myself right now.

The Church Bells of Long Ago. And one other thought of the olden time church going. I have spoken of the scarcity of time pieces. And that, perchance, is the reason why every olden time church had a bell to summon the worshippers.

A hundred years ago they would as soon have thought of having a church without a preacher as without a bell. Perhaps the day of their utility is gone but oh! I miss them, those deep-tinted, sweet-voiced, solemn bells of my boyhood, echoing for miles over woodland and hillside on a still, sunny Sabbath morning. Part of these digressions from the thread of my historical story.

The Founding of a School and the Burning of the Original Buildings. In the manner which has been narrated briefly the Lutheran church in Harrisburg was fairly launched into existence dissociated from the German Reformed congregation, and the fair Zion was born that has now lived and flourished for one hundred years, and yet, with all that age upon it, shows marks of neither decrepitude or senility. The Lutheran church in Harrisburg was fairly launched into existence dissociated from the German Reformed congregation, and the fair Zion was born that has now lived and flourished for one hundred years, and yet, with all that age upon it, shows marks of neither decrepitude or senility. The Lutheran church in Harrisburg was fairly launched into existence dissociated from the German Reformed congregation, and the fair Zion was born that has now lived and flourished for one hundred years, and yet, with all that age upon it, shows marks of neither decrepitude or senility.

At that time common schools were unknown and provisions for education were largely in the hands of the several churches. In 1822, the Fourth street congregation erected a large two-story brick school house adjoining the church. In 1829, a steeple was placed upon their place of worship.

October 21, 1838, both church and school house were entirely destroyed in one of the most spectacular fires that of the borough of Harrisburg had witnessed up to that time.

How the New Church Rose From the Ashes of the Old. The next day Zion's membership met amid the charred ruins and yet smoldering ashes and, undaunted by disaster, resolved to rebuild. The first assembly in the new building was the Whig convention that nominated General William Henry Harrison, the hero of Tippecanoe, for the presidency, the building not having been consecrated as yet. This was the first fully representative National convention ever held in the United States. For reasons of political expediency, the relation of which would not be germane to this paper, the leaders of the new Whig party deemed it policy to hold their convention in Pennsylvania's Capital, and the spacious new church



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was the largest available room in the borough. Of the various alterations and improvements which have been made in the building during the seventy-five years which have elapsed since its erection this paper will not attempt to treat.

An Honored Roll of Pastors. The resident pastors during the time that all the Lutherans of the borough were united in one congregation were: The Rev. Henry Moeller, 1795-1803.

The Rev. J. D. Peterson, 1803-1812. The Rev. F. C. Schaeffer, 1812-1815.

The Rev. John George Lochman, D. D., whose mortal remains rest within the shadow of these walls, 1815-1826. The Rev. Augustus H. Lochman, 1827-1836.

The Rev. Samuel Sprechel, 1836-1840. The Rev. Charles W. Sbaeffer, 1841-1849.

All of these men were earnest, able and conscientious heralds of the cross of Christ and the way of man's redemption; and several of them stood high in their State and national reputation as pillars of the greatest authority in the championship of Lutheranism and evangelical Christianity.

The Progeny of Old "Zion". From the grand old Zion church has arisen a numerous progeny, the first of which was the St. Michael's congregation organized in 1843. I have given but the briefest epitome of the rise of Lutheranism in Harrisburg and cannot follow at all, in this paper, the various offshoots or the subsequent history of the Zion church.

The first division was largely on the lines of the use of the German and English languages in church services. All the pastors in the list just given preached alternately in German and English, except the first two who used the German only.

And now, as a younger generation had grown up who used the English language almost exclusively, an agitation began such as had occurred in a

hundred other similar cases. There was a constantly growing element that desired to have a greater proportion of the services in the tongue in most common use in our land.

But, on the other hand, these were many, particularly among the elder, who clung tenaciously to the language of the fatherland. In some cases their knowledge of English was not sufficient to receive the full benefit of a discourse delivered in that tongue. But, beyond this, there were, in many cases, sentimental associations which had been woven into the warp and woof of life.

The German language was associated with tender incidents of their childhood or that of their ancestors, in far off homes along the Rhine, the Weser and the Elbe. It was in the German language that vows had been made for them by sponsors in baptism. In German, they had themselves assumed those vows in the holy ceremonies of church confirmation. In German, husband and wife had pledged troth at the altar, and in German, dear ones, wearied with the march of life, had been laid to rest.

Beneath the low green tent, Whose curtains never outward swing, An idle life surely passed— Up round thee from thy stupa. And gird the armor on! When once a firm resolve is made, Full half the battle's won.

What right hast thou to squander The talents God hath sent? What right in rust to bury The powers that He has sent? They're yours to battle nobly In strong defense of right; They're yours, to carve your shining way Up to the hills of light.

Up from all dull supineness! Up with a righteous trust! An idle life surely passes— To shame and carnal lust— Work, while the day endureth! Work, till the evening come! At evening when the shadows fall, God calls His workmen home.

and women of Zion from 1787 to 1843, the period imperfectly covered in this paper, were upright, God-fearing citizens of the home and sinew of the borough of Harrisburg.

Items appearing from time to time in the "Oracle of Dauphin," Harrisburg's earliest newspaper, and in its immediate successors in the journalistic field, as well as information gleaned from other sources, indicate that the early membership of Zion were prominent and industrious workers in the various avocations of life, of the very best element of that primitive population that laid the foundation stones for the glorious development of our city, of our State, of our mighty nation.

Diligent in business, they were also fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, not as a matter of ostentation, but as one of right and duty.

Could a wireless from the realms of the spirit land come from these worthies long laid in sleep, to us of the present, might it not be couched in words like these:

Brother, never rest a moment, With useless, folded hands, Unmindful of the barren spots, And wastes of desert lands— Up round thee from thy stupa. And gird the armor on! When once a firm resolve is made, Full half the battle's won.

Up from all dull supineness! Up with a righteous trust! An idle life surely passes— To shame and carnal lust— Work, while the day endureth! Work, till the evening come! At evening when the shadows fall, God calls His workmen home.

to look into a gasoline tank on an auto. The tank exploded with terrific force.

FIREMEN'S DELAY COST LIFE

Back for Ladders, Too Late to Save Woman in Peril. Wilkes-Barre, Pa., Nov. 24.—Delay encountered by city firemen in reaching a blaze that destroyed the Presto dining parlors in this city, early yesterday morning, caused the death of Mary Polcar, 29 years old, of No. 25 Amber lane.

The first trucks to arrive at the fire had no ladders to reach a third-story window, where the woman appeared a minute after hot grease took fire in the kitchen, and by the time the extension ladders were summoned the poor woman had become frantic. She attempted to regain the first floor, and was caught by the sweeping flames.

The Presto room was destroyed, at a loss of about \$10,000.

MADE PASSENGER AGENT

George W. Hay Succeeds Charles E. Lee in Lehigh Valley Office. South Bethlehem, Pa., Nov. 24.—General Baggage and District Passenger Agent George W. Hay, of the Lehigh Valley railroad, was last evening notified of his appointment to the position of general passenger agent of the company, to succeed Charles E. Lee, of New York.

Mr. Hay assumed his new duties at New York to-day.

Man Blown to Atoms

Titusville, Pa., Nov. 24.—Ralph Patbos, 38 years old, was blown to atoms near here. He was loading a wagon with nitroglycerin when it exploded. The detonation was felt for miles.

Boy Eighth Auto Victim

Shamokin, Pa., Nov. 24.—Struck by an automobile at Kulpmont yesterday, Frank Jason, a boy, was fatally injured. He was the eighth victim of automobiles at that place the past season.