



Rev. Dr. Victor Baer points to the historic marker of Donegal Presbyterian Church

**DONEGAL
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
FOUNDED PRIOR TO 1721
BY SETTLERS FROM THE NORTH OF IRELAND
FIRST CHURCH BUILT OF LOGS
PRESENT BUILDING ERECTED IN 1740
PATENT GRANTED BY JOHN THOMAS AND RICHARD PENN
JUNE 4, 1740.
PRESBYTERY OF DONEGAL ORGANIZED
IN THIS CHURCH OCTOBER 11, 1732.
MEMBERS OF THIS CONGREGATION HAVE FIGURED PROMINENTLY
IN ALL WAYS OF THIS COUNTRY.

Dr. Victor L. Baer, pastor at historic Donegal Presbyterian, formerly in NYC, is Lanco native

The Rev. Victor L. Baer, D.D., pastor of historic Donegal Presbyterian Church, Mount Joy, is a large affable man with a ready laugh and a twinkle in his eye.

He became pastor at Donegal on Feb. 1, 1978. Immediately before, he had been pastor of Brick Presbyterian Church, Park Avenue and 92nd Street, New York City, one of the most wealthy churches in New York, with numerous millionaires among its members, an annual budget of more than \$½ million, \$30,000 being spent on music alone, which, says Dr. Baer, was "superb."

Interestingly enough, however, when this minister from a fashionable and urban church came to preach a trial sermon at Donegal prior to his appointment, two front pews in the church were filled with his relatives from the Lancaster area. How was this possible? The answer is easy: Dr., or "Vic Baer," as he continually refers to himself, is a native son of Lancaster County, raised in nearby Landisville.

People come up to Dr. Baer and say, "Are you the son of Willis and Emma Baer?" They remember him from the old days.

Lots of the people in the front pews at Donegal when Dr. Baer preached that trial sermon here were Nissleys, relatives on his mother's side.

Dr. Baer's grandfather, whom he remembers vividly, was Samuel B. Nissley, one of the founders of Union National Mount Joy Bank.

As a little boy, Dr. Baer used to watch his grandfather wash his face and hands and neatly comb back his hair before coming to a meal.

Also present at that trial sermon (which must have been very successful, since he was appointed) was Gen. Daniel B. Strickler, Dr. Baer's former Sunday School teacher at First Presbyterian in Lancaster, which Dr. Baer attended as a boy.

Actually, Dr. Baer had preached in Donegal Church years before, soon after he had finished his studies at Princeton Seminary. Present in the congregation that time had been Bishop Hiram Kauffman of the Mennonite Church. Bishop Kauffman lived across the street from the Baers in Landisville, and wanted to hear what sort of sermon the boy he had watched growing up, would preach.

Dr. Baer's father Willis Baer was a most unusual man, well remembered by all who knew him, because he made a strong impression. Born on a large farm near Landisville, Willis Baer did not want to farm. He put himself through Franklin and Marshall College, then taught school for a while. Tiring of that he took a job in a Lancaster bank. For ten years he was a teller in the bank. Then came the time to appoint a new cashier, a position for which Baer was considered. But unlike his rival for the post, he would do none of the ingratiating required for securing the coveted job. His rival, naturally, got the job.

Willis Baer then set his

mind to another course in life. He attended Columbia University, while his family, including little Victor stayed behind in Landisville, and earned himself a Ph. D. in economics. He was in his forties now when he took his family south to teach economics and banking at John B. Stetson University in Florida. Young Victor attended that school, named for the famed hat manufacturer, and then went on to Princeton Seminary.

His first pastorate was at a large church in Cincinnati, where he was assistant pastor. While in Cincinnati he organized a new church on the outskirts of town, Trinity, which initially had only 12 members. But under Rev. Baer's leadership it grew rapidly.

He then continued his education, studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York and earning an M.A.

World War II was on by then, and although as a clergyman, exempt from military service, Rev. Baer volunteered. He was turned down for bad eyesight.

Wanting to serve during the crisis years, he then volunteered with the American Friends Service Committee, ending up north of the Arctic Circle in Finland, where he did construction work, helping to build a hospital. Throughout that summer he was in the land of the midnight sun, which never went down.

On his way back from Finland he stopped off in London. A friend of his tried to persuade him to stay for a while in England, saying it would be Baer's only chance

for the valuable experience he could gain there. Rev. Baer had only \$25 in his pocket, plus his ticket home. When Sir Stafford Cripps, however, devalued the British pound, Baer suddenly found himself with \$50 in his pocket; this doubling of his wealth was a small factor in his deciding to stay longer in England.

He went to work in the slums along the docks, doing mission work with the youth there, many of whom were pretty tough customers. He remembers one of these dock boys well, a lad of 14 named "Waitson." The boys used to play ping pong shuffleboard and other games. One day Dr. Baer noted that some money had been stolen. "Alright, Waitson, where is it?"

Rev. Baer barred the doors, saying no one would leave until the money was returned. "They tore the place up," says Dr. Baer today. "That Waitson was a real handful."

He was working with a slightly older group of young men. One day they came to him and said to him, "We want to learn more about the church. How did the church get here?"

Rev. Baer started a class in church history for them. Over tea, they discussed church history and, in addition, politics, socialism, America, and race relations. The talk, and the arguments ranged everywhere. The group went to see T.S. Eliot's play *The Cocktail Party*, which was playing then in London. When Rev. Baer left, the young men presented him with a copy of the play.

Back in the States, Rev. Baer became a co-pastor at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, working closely with famous pastor George Buttrick (author of *Prayer*) and two other co-pastors. Each minister was responsible for one aspect of the ministry; Rev. Baer's specialty was pastoral care.

Dr. Baer remembers his days at Madison Avenue fondly. The cooperation among the ministers was the very best of fellowship. The activities of the church with all classes of people was a model of Christian ministry. Rev. Baer's admiration for George Buttrick as preacher and man is profound.

It was while he was working with the famed Buttrick at Madison Avenue Church that he met and married Mary Louise Koch, who was then director of the day school at Madison Avenue Church. The Baers have "adopted" a number of students, whose education they help to support. A number of these students helped by the Baers have attended Pikeville College in the hills and coal regions of Kentucky. Over the years Rev. Baer gave freely of his time, helping this backwoods college. In appreciation, Pikeville conferred upon Rev. Baer the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

In 1959 he left Madison Avenue Church to become pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Ossining. In 1971 he went to Brick Church in New York. In 1978 he came to Donegal.

After his wide-ranging and cosmopolitan career, Dr. Baer says some people have thought he came to Donegal "to retire."

"To retire!" he says. "No way. I can't retire here. There's too much going on here."

He says 55 per cent of the membership at Donegal is under 45 years of age. Donegal is an active dynamic church. "If anyone thinks it's dull out here, they ought to have another think coming!" He is proud of the different types of

members at Donegal: teachers, doctors, editors, bankers, all walks of life.

Does he miss New York? "Yes, but not enough to go back. New York is exciting, stimulating, and—**exhausting**. There are tensions and pressures in New York.

"I enjoy being my own man and having warm personal relations with people. I know the people here; they know me. I'm no longer a specialist; I'm a g.p. now. (general practitioner) here. It's much more rewarding.

"People come to Donegal Church for four main reasons:

"1. It's a family church; many of the members are related; their parents came here;

"2. It's small with 225 vital members;

"3. It's historic, and many people value history; and

"4. It's in the country, beautiful country; people love this church and love to look out the windows.

"People come from all around—Lititz, York, all over.

"People really care for and love this church. They support it."

Dr. Baer says the church saw some lean days in the past. It was dying early in the century. The Donegal Society was formed in 1911 to preserve this historic church. In the last few decades the church has been revitalized. The fact that the Rev. Victor L. Baer, D.D. is its pastor today is a sign of that revitalization.

Dr. Baer sits in the old Study House, where circuit preachers used to study and rest before preaching and muses about the fact that the first preacher at the church, James Anderson came here in 1727 from First Presbyterian Church in New York City. "Two hundred and fifty years later Vic Baer comes here from New York," Dr. Baer says.

Of course it wasn't Dr. Baer's first trip here as it was for Rev. Anderson.

"Vic" Baer is back home. He's one of us.

Time for Round Robin Riot tennis tourney

It's time again for the annual Round Robin Riot ladies tennis tournament, sponsored by the Mount Joy Tennis Club, for Mount Joy area women.

The "Riot" is scheduled for Monday, October 1st. Players should be at the Mount Joy tennis courts at 9:30 AM and bring their own lunch. Play will finish at

2:30 PM.

This tournament is set up so that players are teamed according to ability. Ladies who enjoy tennis, but are beginners or intermediate level players are encouraged to join in the fun.

Anyone interested in the tournament should contact Mrs. Joseph Coover, RD#1, Mount Joy, or phone 426-2156, by Sept. 28th.

Cake show

Capitol Area Kake Enthusiasts (C.A.K.E.) invite you to their 3rd annual cake decorators' show and competition on Oct. 13th at the Carlisle Plaza Mall, from 10:00 to 5:00.

The competition will be divided into categories by age and professional status.

There will also be a non-cake contest (marzipan, royal icing, gum paste, etc.).