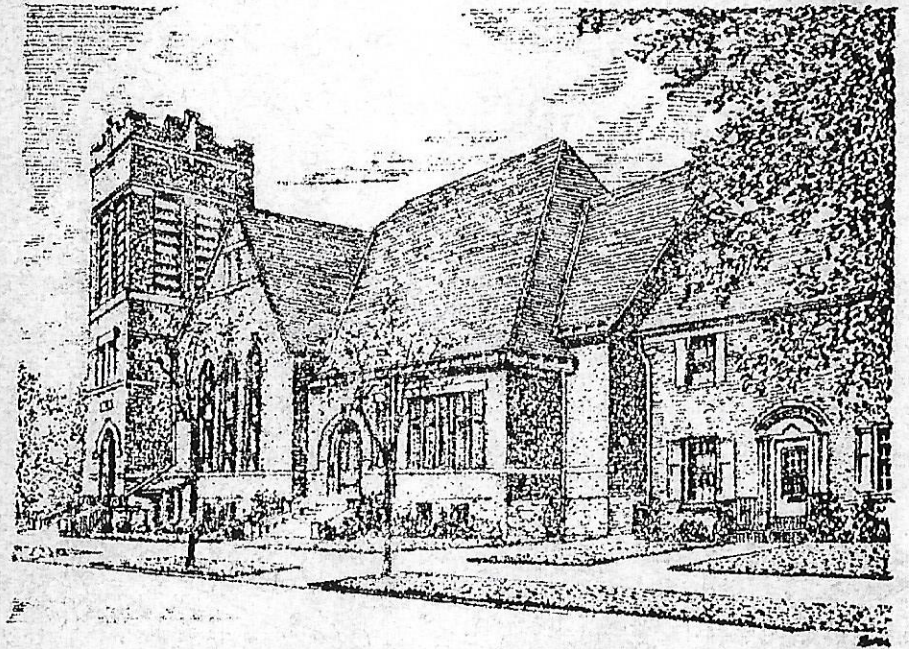


*"Grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ."*



**Hebron Lutheran Church
Leechburg, Pennsylvania**

A
History
of

Hebron Congregation

Leechburg, Pa.

FACTS OF LUTHERANISM IN THIS AREA

Pioneer Churches

Earliest Lutheran Service	1796
First recorded communion in Klingensmith church and used as date of organized Lutheran effort in this area	September 14, 1814
Log and brick churches built, about	1820
Log and brick church groups united under the name Salem	1844
Hebron in Leechburg	
First Confirmation and Communion	September 28, 1833
Congregation regularly organized	July 17, 1842
Cornerstone of first church building laid	September 24, 1845
Church dedicated and the name HEBRON given	November 30, 1847
Congregation incorporated	June 22, 1848
Salem congregation merged with Hebron	March 17, 1860
Leechburg Academy conducted	1863 - 1873
Congregation divided and First Church formed	1868
Present church began construction	1887
Present church dedicated	September 9, 1888
Original parsonage erected	1889
Congregation divided and Grace Church formed	1900
Pipe organ installed	1905
Chancel rearranged and newly furnished	1914
Lower church rooms constructed	1936
Present parsonage constructed	1954

Lutheranism had its beginning in the area surrounding Leechburg in 1796 when the Rev. John M. Steck, pioneer missionary of Greensburg added this territory to his mission field. That he was a pioneer is realized when the fact is noted that 1796 was only fourteen years after the burning of Hannastown, which was probably the most devastating Indian raid was made into Westmoreland County.

At first Pastor Steck preached here only once or twice a year in such places as were available: the home of Jacob Klingensmith in Westmoreland County, about a mile west of Leechburg, and the home of John Hill several miles north in Armstrong County, (the D.N. Sober farm). The Kiskiminetas River marks a natural division between them. The former center developed in 1814 into the organization of Klingensmiths' or Salem Church. The work on the Armstrong side developed first in the organization of "The Forks" or "Zion" Church and later into Hebron Church, Leechburg, Pa. Many of the pioneer settlers, were of staunch Lutheran stock, having come from Moshem Church in Berks County, Pa., thence to the Harrold's Church, near Greensburg, thence to Armstrong County.

From 1817 to the early 1830's, Pastors John Adam Mohler and G. A. Reichert preached at the several churches in this area.

On the foundation of an early church erected in this area, now the site of Pleasant Hill cemetery, there is a memorial tablet placed on November 4, 1934 which reads in part:

"This tablet marks the site of a pioneer Lutheran and Reformed Church known as: "Klingenschmidt", "Tishgiminas", "Allegheny", or "Salem". Lutheran Services in this section began about 1796.

"The congregation was organized September 2, 1814 at the Jacob Klingenschmidts farm about one mile south of this point;

where a log church was erected in 1820.

"A brick church was erected on this site about the same time; the land being donated by Daniel Frantz.

"After 1844 both groups worshipped in this church. The burial ground was used as early as 1810.

"The Reformed Congregation merged with the Lutherans in 1852. The Lutheran congregation ceased to worship here May 26, 1860; after which time its life continued through the Lutheran Churches in Leechburg."

From 1796 to 1816 the Rev. J. M. Steck continued to make regular visits to the community; and it was to him that the fathers of Leechburg looked for the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Leechburg as a community center took its beginning in 1827, when, in the construction of the State Canal, a dam and locks were located at this site. The developing village became the point where Pastor Michael John Steck, son of the pioneer, organized the group into a congregation and administered the first communion September 28, 1833. Of the thirty communing, nineteen were confirmed on that day. In 1841, Pastor Steck resigned this part of his large parish and the Rev. Jacob Zimmerman preached his introductory sermon in Leechburg, on July 24, 1841 and formally organized the congregation on July 17, 1842.

In the summer of 1844, Pastor Zimmerman resigned and the Rev. David Earhart (grandfather of Amelia Earhart, pioneer aviatrix) became pastor. During Pastor Earhart's period of service the first church building in Leechburg was erected. The congregation authorized the building project on March 9, 1845.

In 1845 the first church building was erected. This building, constructed of brick, 40 x 50 feet, with main story and basement, was erected at a cost of \$1,082.03½: was the first church building in Leech-

burg, and served Hebron Church until 1887. On the 30th of May, 1847 the Pittsburgh Synod being in session here, the Church was dedicated by the Rev. Michael J. Steck under the particular name of Hebron. The Rev. W. A. Passavant preached the sermon. A charter was secured from the court of Armstrong Co. June 22, 1848.

Upon the consummation of Rev. Earhart's pastorate, the Rev. George F. Ehrenfeld served as supply pastor during 1853 and 1854. The Rev. John W. Cregelo was elected pastor August 7, 1854 but died a few weeks after taking charge.

The next pastor was Rev. Lewis Marchand Kuhns (1854-66); a son of the congregation and "a tower of strength in Hebron". During this pastorate, Salem congregation located on what is now designated Pleasant Hill, merged with Hebron. During this same pastorate, in 1863 David Kuhns gave to the congregation the plot of ground where the church now stands for the erection of an academy. The "Leechburg Institute" was an academy or high school for the purpose of affording "Unto persons of both sexes, opportunities for acquiring a knowledge of the common and higher branches of education". A catalogue of 1864-65 shows enrollment of 40 boys and 55 girls from Indiana, Penna., Wheeling, W. Va., and Pittsburgh as well as many local students. This academy for a quarter of a century exerted a strong cultural influence on the community. The academy building served not only for school purposes but was the town center. At the close of this pastorate, Hebron had become a strong well established congregation.

The Rev. Johnathan Sarver became pastor in 1866. In these years occurred the great rupture in the Lutheran Church which resulted in the establishment of two bodies, the General Council and the General Synod. Pastor Sarver favored the General Council and with a portion of members separated themselves from the group in 1867. After several years litigation,

the General Synod group was permitted to retain possession of all property and the General Council group organized in 1868 a new congregation under the name of the First Lutheran Church.

The Rev. H. N. Hall became pastor of the Hebron congregation which adhered to the General Synod serving from 1868-70.

The next three pastors were: Rev. F. T. Hoover 1870-1881; the Rev. Lewis Hay 1881-1885; Rev. J. W. Poffinberger 1885-1897.

The twelve years of Pastor Poffinberger's leadership deserves special notice. Under his leadership the membership grew to 491 and the present church was built at a cost of \$18,000 and dedicated on Sept. 9, 1888, free of debt. (See FACTS) The same year action was taken to erect a parsonage which was built the following year. At the close of the century, the new community of Vandergrift was being established and Pastor Poffinberger became interested in the missionary challenge there. He resigned in July, 1897 to pursue work in this field.

Rev. J. C. N. Park was the next pastor from 1898 to 1900, when friction in the parish resulted in the withdrawal of a number of members and the organization of Grace Church.

The irenic spirit of Dr. G. M. Heindel did much to restore the former prosperity of the parish during his pastorate from 1900 to 1905.

Dr. E. E. Blint followed with a pastorate of 24 years. Dr. E. S. Burgess, historian of the former Pittsburgh Synod, says of this pastorate, "by a spirit rarely equalled, he was able to build up a congregation of 724 confirmed members. The benevolence of Hebron Church under his leadership were an inspiration to the entire Pittsburgh Synod."

Dr. George E. Bowersox followed with a pastorate of 22 years (1930-1952). In spite of the "great depression" which severely affected this area during the early 30's, it was during this pastorate that the church facilities were enlarged for church school purposes.

Within the last decade a few noteworthy items have transpired. A new parsonage was erected replacing the one which served as a home for the pastors during the preceding 65 years. Through Abiding Memorials and Gifts, much has been added to enhance the program of the congregation; landscaping of the church property; equipment for the church and Sunday School; building, endowment and benevolent funds; a series of six art glass windows depicting the nature of the Church and, the life of our Lord have been installed in the church office and in the Luther League room. The congregation has reached a new dimension in her stewardship opportunity through a sealed covenant pledge known as Bond of Faith and Love.

Within the history of the congregation, eight persons have entered full time service in the Church; the Rev. L. M. Kuhns, W. K. Hill, B. E. Shaner, J. J. Hill, F. E. Smith, and George Bowersox Jr., Miss Elizabeth Knepshield and Sister Edna C. Hill. Sister Edna Hill after years as a parish deaconess and seventeen years as directing sister of the Baltimore Motherhouse returned to her home congregation where she served as parish deaconess until her retirement in 1959. Harry G. Souders a recent graduate of Thiel College will enter the seminary in the fall of 1964.

The saints of Christ at Hebron, past and present through the life in His Church, have become channels of God's grace because they know in Whom they have believed and, Whom they serve.

Contents of Cornerstone in Present Church Building

1. Holy Bible
2. Book of Worship
3. Minutes of General Synod
4. Minutes of Pittsburg Synod
5. Lutheran Observer
6. Sunday School Herald
7. Little Ones
8. County Paper
9. Leechburg Advance
10. Philadelphia Papers giving full account of the centennial of the constitution of Pennsylvania.
11. Augsburg Lesson Book
12. Augsburg Teacher
13. History of Hebron Church
14. List of members of the church

Our Church Organ

Historical Background

February 1, 1905, "Motion to submit Mr. Carnegie's offer relative to organ to congregation at regular annual meeting and music committee instructed to prepare a statement for the congregation, setting forth cost and conditions (changes in church etc.) necessary for such organ."

November 23, 1905, "Invitation to J. W. Poffinberger and Dr. G. M. Heindel to attend organ dedication Dec. 10th and also invite Rev. John Weidly to preach dedication Service."

January 9, 1938, "action of organ changed from "tubular-pneumatic" to "electro-pneumatic". Contract let to J.A. Dahlstadt of Pittsburgh.

September 8, 1946, Chimes added to the organ as a memorial to Cora Trout Slonaker by her husband.

By phone conversation with M. P. Moller Co. on December 8, 1961, it was revealed that the original cost of organ installation was \$2,400. Moller Co. stated that replacement value of this organ as of this date would be between \$25,000. and \$27,000.

December 10, 1961, fifty six years to the day the organ having just been renovated and reconditioned, a service was held, when a recital and demonstration of the organ was given by Mr. Lawrence Nehrer.