

HISTORY OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN INDIANA COUNTY.

During the last decade of the eighteenth century a number of Lutheran families from Lancaster, Berks and Franklin counties, settled in this community, which was then part of Westmoreland county. Prominent among these settlers was the family of Conrad Rice, sr., who, as early as 1794, located immediately south of the borough limits of Indiana. His house became conspicuous in the history of Lutheranism in the county as having been the first place of their public worship and general stopping place of other Lutheran immigrants.

Early in the nineteenth century other Lutheran families – some from Eastern Pennsylvania, some from Maryland and other direct from Germany – followed and located in different parts of the county. A quite early settlement is found to have existed in the extreme south of the county, and the locality is still called Germany. Others located in Brush Valley, some in Rayne, and others still in the Mahoning townships. These northern settlements were at a somewhat later date.

In the earliest records of the congregation at Indiana, which was the first Lutheran organization in the county, we find names of Conrad Rice, sr., (Properly spelled Reis), Adam Row, sr., (should be Rau), Christian Ruch, Michael Hess, John Fair (more correctly Fähr), Gottfried Klingenger and others.

These scattered families were visited, as early as 1798, by the Rev. J. Michael Steck, sr, of Greensburg, Ohio, preached for them every three months. During the cold season the services were held in the house of Conrad Rice, and during the warmer in his barn. Here, for several years, all the Lutherans from different parts of the county that could, met for public worship. Rev. Steck continued these services for two years, closing with 1800, from which time up to 1813 we have no account of any services in the county. There were either no records kept of they were lost, or they had no preaching during this period.

The Rev. John Gottfried Lambrecht, from the Gymnasium of Göttengen, Germany, visited these people, and at that date organized or reorganized the congregation at Indiana. The officers were Conrad Rice, sr., Christian Ruch, elders and Michael Hess and John Fähr, deacons. At a communion held November 14, 1813, twenty-two persons partook of the holy supper. Another communion, held on the 23d of October, 1814, presents about the same number present, but some new names appear.

From the names of members it is manifest that this organization was intended to be limited to those who lived within a reasonable distance of Indiana to attend service there. The same Rev. Lambrecht, about this time, also organized a congregation in Brush Valley township, which became a part of his pastorate. Up to this time we find no record of *regular* services being held, and organized congregations formed save in the vicinity of Indiana. These services in Brush Valley, as in other parts, were held in private dwellings, and for a season in Fry's barn during the summer months. This congregation seems to have grown in numbers, under the ministrations of their successive pastors. So that in 1822 they built a log church on the site of their present edifice, two miles from Mechanicsburg, and in 1823 Rev. Richart – who became pastor at Indiana on 1822 – enrolled a membership of seventy-five communicants. Theirs was the first Lutheran Church built in Indiana county. The ministry of Rev. G. A. Richart brings the history of this congregation down to 1826, when he resigned the field and took charge at Kittanning, in Armstrong county.

The Rev. Lambrecht resigned the Indiana pastorate at the close of 1814, the charge remained without a regular pastor, but was visited and supplied as best they could be. In 1817, a man by the name of Hoover, attempted to impose himself upon them as a Lutheran minister, but his deception was soon discovered and he was summarily dismissed.

Rev. Shultz became their pastor in 1819, but remained but a short time. In 1821 the Rev. Möhler supplied them and from 1822 to 1826 the Rev. Richart served the Indiana pastorate with acceptance and success. From the organization of the church at Indiana up to the close of the ministry of Rev. Richart, the regular services were conducted exclusively in the German language. In May of the year 1827 the Rev. Nicholas G. Sharretts became pastor and introduced English preaching. He was highly esteemed by all, and his ministry was attended with very marked success. He still lives in the affections of many in this community both in and out of the Lutheran Church.

The congregation at Indiana, like those of other denominations at that day, labored under disadvantages for want of a suitable place of worship. For a time they altered their services with others in the use of the court house. But in 1829, they resolved to erect a church for themselves. A lot was procured on the corner of Church and South Clymer streets, and a brick church 42x50 feet, with basement, vestibule, end gallery, cupola and bell, was completed in 1830. This house was solemnly dedicated to the service of Almighty God, during the session of the West-Pennsylvania Synod, at Indiana, October 8, 1831. Rev. S. S. Schmucker, D. D., of the Theology Seminary, at Gettysburg, preached the dedicatory sermon in the English

language and the Rev. W. Yeager, preached in the German. The new church at Indiana, greatly encouraged the congregation, and cheered the heart of their beloved pastor.

During the first year of Rev. Shawett's pastorate at Indiana, he directed his attention to the Lutherans in and around Blairsville, and soon organized a congregation of twenty-five members, as follows: John Fair, sr., and wife; Muchael Rugh and wife; Henry Libengood, sr., and wife; Louisa Altman; David Earhart and wife; Elizabeth Earhart; Mary Repine; Dorotha Crissman; Jacob Loose and wife; Elizabeth Harrold; Peter Mikesell and wife; Catharine Hill; Catharine Repine; Ann Maria Kunkle; Charlotte Mikesell; Elizabeth Mikesell.

Henry Libengood, sr., and John Fair, sr, were elected elders. Michael Rugh and David Earhart, deacons.

The congregation was known as the "Hebron Congregation." Immediately after the organization, measures were taken for the erection of a church, material and labor were contributed by the members, and a log church was erected – which is still standing on the lot on Walnut street, now owned by the heirs of the late Rev. Samuel H. Shepley. Mr. Jacob Altman, a citizen of Blairsville, and by profession a Baptist – but no congregation of this denomination being within reach – worshiped with this congregation and contributed freely to its support. He took an active interest in the erection of the church, and largely through his efforts, a bell was placed upon the building. The same bell is still in use on the church since erected, and now occupied by the congregation. On the 12th of May, 1832, Jacob Altman, united with this congregation, and in the course of succeeding years, his entire family became members of the same.

This congregation was served in connection with Indiana and Brushville, the three points constituting one charge. By the untiring efforts of Rev. Sharretts the congregation rapidly increased in membership, so that their church became too small, and in 1833 they asked and obtained permission to hold their communion in the Presbyterian Church. In 1835, the membership having reached one hundred and fifty, they determined to erect a larger building. Mr. Henry Graff – brother of the venerable John Graff, now of Blairsville, an elder of the congregation – presented it with a deed for two lots on the corner of Campbell and Liberty streets. Preparations for building were at once begun, and in 1836 a brick church forty-four by sixty-two feet was completed.

Too much praise can not be given Henry Graff for his untiring energy in carrying forward this work amid the many surrounding discouragements, the greatest of which was the death of their beloved pastor, who died on the 31st of December, 1836, and was buried on the church lot of the Indiana congregation, where he remained until the death of his wife, in December, 1878, when they were placed side by side in Oakland Cemetery, at Indiana, Pa. This charge now remained vacant for two years, during which time the members became greatly scattered, many of them uniting with other churches.

In the year 1838 Rev. Jacob Medtart became pastor and served the charge until 1843. Although there is no record of the separation of the Blairsville congregation from the Indiana charge, yet in 1839 we find that Rev. Augustus Babb, D. D., became their pastor. It now became a new charge, with New Derry and probably Germany, in West Wheatfield township. On March 1st of the same year the Plum Creek congregation, in South Mahoning township, was united to the Indiana charge, occupying one-fourth of the time of the pastor.

The Plum Creek congregation was the result of the labors of Rev. Reichart, who, in 1829 – living in Kittanning – visited a number of families in South Mahoning township, namely: Conrad Luckart, Andrew Weamer, Andrew Harman, Philip Bricker, and others. He preached regularly for them in the barn of Philip Bricker. In the year 1830, he organized a congregation, which is known as the "Plum creek congregation." Andrew Weamer and Christian Hoover, were elected elders. In 1832, they determined to build a church. A half-acre lot was bought of Philip Bricker, to build on, and Andrew Weamer, Conrad Luckart and Ezekial Green, were appointed a building committee. The members subscribed material, labor, or money, as they were best able, and in the spring of 1833, a log church was raised, but was not fully completed until 1835. Rev. Reichart remained pastor of this congregation until 1839, preaching every eight weeks.

On the 28th of May, 1842, Rev. Medtart organized a congregation in Smicksburg, with the enrollment of the following members: Cornelius Lowe, Joseph Black and wife, Mary Condon, Jacob Condon and wife, Elizabeth Hoover, Samuel Hoover, Absalom Hoover, John Hoover, Mrs. M. M. Good, Henry Rush and wife, Mary Ann Mogle, Adam Mogle and wife, John Miller, George Stear, sr., Catharine Stear, John Stear and Wife, Mrs. Elizabeth Crissman, Elizabeth Miller.

Jacob Condon was elected elder, Joseph Black and Cornelius Lowe, deacons.

This congregation was also made part of the Indiana charge, and was accordingly served by Rev. Medtart.

Rev. Medtart remained pastor of the charge until 1843, when he was succeeded by Rev. Henry Bishop. During the pastorate of the latter, the Indiana congregation erected a parsonage on their church lot, on the corner of Church and Clymor streets, and the Smicksburg people commenced and put up a frame church.

In the month of August, 1846, the Plum creek congregation withdrew from the Indiana charge and with the Smicksburg, Round-top and Rural village congregations formed a new charge. A call was extended to Rev. A. C. Ehrenfeld, who became their pastor on the first of January, 1847. We have been unable to find any record of the formation of the Round-top congregation. All that we have been able to learn is that it was organized about 1839, by some minister from Clearfield county, and at that time the following Lutheran families were living in that community: Frederick Sprenkel, Nicholas Maul, Henry Wyning, Col. John Willhelm. George Fitterhoof, Michael Lantz, Jacob Schaffer, Conrad Ramy.

As Rural village is in the adjoining county, we have no further interest at present with its history.

The Blairsville congregation prospered greatly under the care of Rev. Babb; the membership increased from 96 to 250. But about this time, as if to prevent the necessity of enlarging the church building, emigration began, and the liberal, cheerful Henry Graff, with his family, moved to Pittsburgh. Many other families followed from time to time, so that notwithstanding large accessions made under the administration of succeeding pastors, the congregation has never attained its former numerical strength.

On the 14th of December, 1845, Rev. Peter Saham took charge of the congregation and remained its pastor until 1848, when Rev. A Borseman, followed him. In the year 1850, fifteen farmers of his church emigrated to the Western States. This was a severe loss to the congregation, leaving them but eighty-four members. Rev. Borseman was succeeded in 1852 by the Rev. Graft M. Pile, who remained in charge but six months; Rev. William Kopp supplied the congregation during the remainder of the year, when Rev. John Suman became the regular pastor. During his ministry the Lutheran chapel was organized, and a brick house of worship erected. They also built a parsonage in Blairsville during his time.

In 1850 the pastor of the Indiana charge, Rev. Bishop, was succeeded by Rev. C. J. Dinninger. On account of ill health he was compelled to resign in 1853. On the 1st of January of the same year, Rev. Peter Saham accepted a call to this pastorate, and remained its faithful leader until 1858, and on the 1st of January, was succeeded by Rev. W. S. Emery. In April of 1859, the congregation numbered about two hundred regular members. Rev. Emery resigned in 1862, and in the same year Rev. J. P. Hentz became pastor. He remained in charge until the fall of 1864. With the closing of Rev. Hentz's labors, the Germans separated themselves from the Indiana congregation. The English portion then alone extended a call to the Rev. A. C. Ehrenfeld, of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, who took charge of the field on the 1st of January 1865. For the first time in the history of the Indiana congregation, it alone resolved to support a pastor and to engage him for all his time, even though the Germans had withdrawn their support. So the new pastor was to preach English only. Finding, however, some eight or ten German families who refused to leave the church, the pastor, by voluntary engagement, held extra service in German on the afternoons of every third Sabbath, which continued for about two years. There was also an out station in the bounds of the congregation, at Wolf's schoolhouse, where afternoon services were held every third Lords' day.

This point as advanced in importance that it became necessary to constitute a separate congregation and erect for themselves a house of worship. A church was accordingly organized, and the following officers composed the council: William Wolf and Jacob Garman were *Elders*, and Robert Little, Jacob Faith, George Reh and C. J. Speedy the *Deacons*.

In 1873 they erected a neat frame church, 38 by 58 feet, two stories, arched ceiling, and corner tower. The site on which the church was erected, together with the burying ground, was generously donated by that excellent Christian lady, the late widow Cooper, of Rayne township. This house was dedicated to the service of God on the 28th day of December, 1873, and was called the *Grove Chapel Evangelical Lutheran Church*. The Rev. George Scholl, of Baltimore, preached the sermon on the occasion. The cost of the building reached something over *four thousand dollars*. The building committee were William Wolf, Capt. Jac. Crepps, George Lotz, Robert Little and Erasmus Cooper. At the first Synodical meeting after the dedication of their house, the congregation reported 106 communicants, and a Sabbath school of 120 pupils and 12 teachers. After the resignation of the Rev. A. C. Ehrenfeld, it was served successively by the Revs. Steck and Bell, pastors at Indiana. It still retains its connection with said charge and its in a flourishing condition.

The Rev. A. C. Ehrenfeld served the *Indiana pastorate* for almost *eleven years*, during which time some dedicated changes were made. As has been said, the service of the pastor was restricted to his congregation and its out station. The English language alone was retained. The church edifice was entirely remodeled and improved. An organ was introduced and the singing was greatly improved, so that it was

not excelled anywhere out of the larger cities. It is due to the people to say that during this time they advanced greatly in liberality. Their contributions grew to be double, some triple, and some four times what they had ever been before. Twice they increased the salary of their pastor, besides making him many generous donations. Expensive repairs were also made in and around the parsonage, and the church was again repaired during the last year. But severe trials also fell on the congregation during the latter part of this period, in the loss of some of the old and substantial members by death and removal – the aged and esteemed Father Jonathan Row, who died in the summer of 1865. Then passing by a number of other deaths and removals, we would mention especially two: the aged and universally beloved Father Conrad Rice, who was about eighty-two years old when he died, in the fall of 1872. And the faithful and devoted brother, Adam Row, who died just a few weeks before in the same year. The loss of these two brethren has ever since been deeply felt by the congregation.

The Sabbath school connected with this church is probably the first that was ever organized in this county. As nearly as we can learn, it was organized about 1822. It was a Union school, and was auxiliary to the American Sunday School Union. Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans all took part in it. We have been told that among its earliest superintendent and officers were the Elder Sutton, father of the late John Sutton, the great Sunday school worker, and Father Conrad Rice. It was held in the Court House and several other places in town, but after the Lutheran church was finished, in 1830, it was removed to the basement of said church. In course of time the other denominations established schools in connection with their respective churches; but the original stem, thus incidentally, still remains the school in connection with the English Lutheran church to this day.

Rev. Ehrenfeld resigned this charge with the view of having it take effect on the 1st of January, 1875, but by the almost unanimous decision of the charge, not to accept his resignation, he was induced to continue his labors for nine months longer, and then, in accordance with his original conviction of duty, having given notice of his purpose to the Council three months before, he closed his pastoral relation on the 1st of October, 1875.

The Germans, having withdrawn from the English church, had only occasional services from visiting ministers, but in 1867 the Rev. J. F. Hayer visited them and succeeded in organizing the congregation. In July of 1868 Rev. Peter Born became their pastor, remaining for two years. He was followed by Rev. Vinzens Klein, who also remained two years. After his resignation the congregation was greatly disorganized, and their entire property (parsonage and church) was sold at Sheriff's sale. Nearly two years now elapsed before they had any regular service, when the Rev. F. A. Herzberger, of Pittsburgh, supplied them for six months. On the 21st of June, 1874, he organized the congregation, and on the 18th of July of the same year Rev. D. Simmons became the regular pastor, remaining until 1880. During the latter part of his ministry a neat brick church was built.

Rev. John J. Suman resigned the Blairsville charge in 1858, and on July 1st of the same year Rev. Cornelius Nitterauer succeeded him. He remained pastor until his death, of hemorrhage of the lungs, on the 11th of May 1861. He was much beloved, and his services were highly appreciated by the congregation. The Rev. H. Beck now for a short time supplied the charge.

In 1861 Rev. Samuel Aughey, Ph. D., L.L. D., was elected pastor. On the 14th of June, 1863, Rev. John R. Williams became pastor and remained until 1867, when he was followed by Rev. Simon P. Snyder, who was pastor until 1870, when the Rev. Augustus Babb, D. D., was recalled. On the 1st of October 1876, he was succeeded by Rev. C. L. Streamer, and on the 1st of November, 1878, the present incumbent became pastor, Viz: Rev. C. M. Stock.

Since the year 1850, there has been but little variation in the Blairsville congregation. The accessions have but little more than balanced the removals and deaths.

Rev. A. C. Ehrenfeld, having resigned the Indiana congregation October 1st, 1875, was followed by Rev. Charlse T. Steck in the beginning of 1876, who remained about two years, and was succeeded by the present pastor, Rev. P. Bell. Under the present pastor the congregation took measures for the building of a new church.

The old brick having stood a half century was torn down in October, 1879, and the parsonage having been removed from the corner of Sixth and Church streets, where it had stood for thirty-five years, to the site of the old church, a new edifice was begun on the corner, fronting on Sixth, and the greater part of the foundation laid before the prevention by frost. Owing to the extraordinary mildness of the winter the work was continued at intervals, and energetically renewed early in the spring, so that at this writing, June 18th, 1880, the building is under roof, and the prospect is that it will be dedicated in October next. It is built of brick, and is gothic in its style of architecture, with corner tower and spire. It is one story, 92 feet long and

42 wide. It embraces, aside from the auditorium, a chapel 22 by 54 feet, fronting on Church street. The main room is 18 feet to the square and 27 on the centre. When finished and furnished as designed it will be characterized by neatness, convenience and comfort. The cost is estimated at \$9,000. Mr. David Simmons superintends the work. The building committee consists of A. H. Apple, George Bodenhomer and Samuel Grove.

The congregation holds its services for the present in the Episcopal Church, and under the care of their present pastor are greatly encouraged, and hopeful of future prosperity.

In 1851, Rev. G. Pile accepted a call from the Smicksburg charge, and remained one year. In 1852, Rev. F. A. Barnitz became pastor, and was followed in 1856 by Rev. C. Diehl. He remained four years when Rev. C. L. Streamer was called and remained in charge until 1869. Rev. Streamer had also labored in the charge during the last year of Rev. Diehl's service, whose failing health rendered him inadequate to attend to the duties of the charge. In 1872, Rev. George A. Lee was elected pastor and remained for two years. He was followed in November, 1874, by Rev. W. E. Crebs who remained until May 1st, 1879. The present pastor, Rev. Ephraim Miller next took charge, in October, 1879.