

The 1700's

The story of any congregation is the story of families, in this case the Berger (Barger) and Keinadt (Koiner) families. Both had their beginnings in Germany, had probably been influenced by William Penn who had traveled extensively in Germany giving glowing accounts of America; both had first emigrated to Pennsylvania, and then to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

The Shenandoah Valley, whose name means "Daughter of the Stars", had been inhabited by Native Americans and explored as early as 1669 by John Lederer, a German who made his way to the crest of the mountains with three Native Americans, and when he saw the expanse of the green valley, prostrated himself upon the ground, saying: "God is nigh!"

In 1716 Governor Spotswood and his party made their passage through the mountains and traveled through country described as so fertile and rich that the grass which sprang from the limestone soil could be tied across the saddles of the travelers.

The town of Staunton was laid out in 1748. It was fairly quiet in the area between 1764-1774, hunting and trapping wolves being one of the more important industries. In 1774 Indian attacks resumed for three years. Augusta County was 20% German at this time, many of the Germans having come from Pennsylvania to find new places to live, plant crops, build log houses, stables and barns (covered sometimes with thatched roofs), and generally transform the frontier.

This, then, was the Valley to which the Berger family came early in the 1700's, and where Jacob Berger was born in 1745. This Jacob Berger is referred to as the patriarch of the congregation. He married Elizabeth Hedrick, whose father owned 625 acres," and their first child, Anna Margaret, was born October 28, 1771 .

The record of this child's baptism on April 6, 1772, before the Boston Tea Party and before the first Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia , is the first entry in the records of Bethany-Trinity Lutheran Church . (Margaret grew up and became Mrs. Casper Koiner) Five other Berger children were baptized between 1773 and 1794. Jacob Berger's wife and children remained at their home while he served under General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. When he returned he settled with his family on a large tract of land in Augusta County .

Michael Keinadt, whose name has been traced back to the Reformation, and whose name is now spelled Koiner, Coiner, Coyner, etc., came to America in 1740, lived in Pennsylvania until the close of the Revolutionary War, when he and his wife Margaret, nee' Diller, bought 303 acres of land on the South River and moved with 12 of their 13 sons to the Shenandoah Valley, (one son remained in Pennsylvania).

The Keinadt's sixth son, Casper , spoke and read English fluently, was a diligent student of the Bible and some of Luther's work. He had preceded his parents to the valley and

had fallen in love with Margaret Barger. Jacob wasn't too happy to have his daughter marry this stranger, so Margaret and Casper went to Staunton in March 1788, were married, and left before the pursuing parents arrived. Twelve children were born of that union, and their descendants constitute the most numerous branch of the Koiner family in America . This large, God-fearing family was for many years the strong support of the congregation now celebrating 200 years. It was this Casper Koiner who erected the first brick house in Waynesboro and who cleared and developed many farms and built houses for his nine sons.

These early settlers brought with them copies of Luther's Bible, his Catechism, and their hymnbooks. As soon as a cabin had been built and their crops planted, they usually sought out others of their faith, gathered several families in a house, barn, or schoolhouse for devotional meetings, the laymen among them conducting simple services when a minister was not available. As far as is known, a Rev. A. Naumann was the first man who preached here. He was killed by a falling tree about the year 1788. Congregations in existence during this era seldom had the services of a Pastor, probably no more than once or twice a year.

After the end of the Revolutionary War, new settlers came into the area and conditions improved. In the summer of 1794 Jacob Barger, Casper Koiner, Nicholas Busch and Kasper Clemen built a log church, the first Lutheran Church in Augusta County , 36' x 40', located nearly in the center of the present graveyard. Michael Keinadt, who was then 71 years old, made the nails for the log church which became known as Spindle's Meeting House, as the Rev. Adolph Spindle (Spindler) preached here until about the year 1809. Spindler was presumably a native of Germany , ordained in 1803 by the Pennsylvania Ministerium that had been organized in 1748.

Before this first log church was finished, Jacob Berger died in his 49th year, and is buried in Trinity cemetery. His wife lived another 47 years.

At this point, we might wonder about the origin of the cemetery. According to the Rev. E. T. Coyner in the Keinadt history,

" . . . it was used as a cemetery about 1730 or 1740, beginning in the northeast corner where the graves were arranged in rows facing the east. There were several graves outside the present fence about 1880, which, like the first hundred graves inside the fence, were marked only with rough flat stones . . . mostly with no dates on them . . . This cemetery was possibly the first cemetery of the whole section of South River."

Pastor Coyner continues,

" . . . The conclusion is inevitable that either there was some sort of church organization long before the log church was built, or that the church acquired the cemetery from some private parties long before 1796."

He concludes that it was originally a part of the old Jacob Slagle farm which adjoined it.

During the period 1794-1797 the Rev. Paul Henkel of the eminent Henkel family of New Market served as pastor. He started many churches in Virginia and traveled extensively in Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, and Ohio, traversing all Ohio in a two-wheeled cart, and participated in the organization of three synods. A remarkable versatile man, he found time to be both author and publisher of hymnbooks and catechisms in English and in German, and to rear five sons for the Lutheran ministry who carried on the family publishing firm. This firm's most important enterprise was the English translation of the Book of Concord after seven years' work. It appeared in 1851 and was carefully read and studied by the members of this congregation, as was "Luther on the Sacraments" (1853) and "Luther's Church Postil" (1869). Pastor Kuegele, in his "Historical Sketch" of the congregation wrote:

"If the now rising generation, many of whom the writer . . . has instructed and confirmed, will study Luther's 'House Postil' as their grandfathers did Luther's Church Postil, then is the future of this congregation secured; for then verily the blessing of the Lord will not depart from it."

We see how the providence of God used this publishing firm to recover the almost forgotten treasures of the Reformation and revive and preserve the faith of our fathers.

We might add here that one of the congregation's treasures is the small German pulpit Bible used in the log church. On the back page, written in German, probably by Pastor Paul Henkel and signed by the two elders of the church, we read:

"This copy of the Holy Scriptures was bought for the use of this congregation and is to be kept for that purpose. We as elders of this church attest this with our own hands."

Augusta County, Keinert's Church

(signed) Nicholas Busch

November 9, 1797 Casper Keinadt"

A pewter plate (London) used in the early communion services, a wooden chest which housed the Communion ware, and the first record book bound in pigskin, pages with royal imprint, with entries made between 1772 and 1845, are also in the congregation's possession. It is very likely that the record book was procured about 1790 and the oldest baptismal records then copied from private family records.

There is some indication that the Rev. Adolph Spindler preached here again between 1797 and 1800. He died in 1837 at the age of 85 and is buried in the cemetery of St. John's United Church of Christ in Augusta County.