BRIEF HISTORY
of
RADER LUTHERAN CHURCH

1765 - 1965
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Bi-Centennial Commemoration Services
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Timberville, Virginia
The present Rader Lutheran Church, dedicated on September 24, 1944.

The fourth Rader church building, built prior to 1881, extensively remodeled in 1940 and destroyed by fire on August 13, 1942.
"The first representative of the land of the Church of the Reformation to enter the Colony of Virginia was John Lederer. No denomination, as far as is known, has laid claim to him as a member. As a consequence he is regarded simply as the first German that crossed the hills, valleys, and plains of Virginia and the Carolinas. He was in the employment of Sir William Berkley, Governor of Virginia, and in the years 1669 and 1670 he explored the wide extent of territory as far south as the Santee River in South Carolina and as far west as the Alleghany Mountains in Virginia. His maps and journal show that he traversed the Valley of Virginia, and touched points later covered by the towns of Strasburg and Front Royal.

Lederer opened a new world to the white man and though he was not followed immediately by immigrant trains, it was not long before the westward direction indicated by his reports was followed by eager explorers. Yet forty-six years passed before men were courageous enough to follow in his steps. Then Governor Spottswood with his Knights of the Golden Horseshoe entered the Valley of Virginia and paved the way for future migrations into the western regions of the Colony of Virginia. This was one year before a little ship arrived in the waters of eastern Virginia bringing the first Lutheran settlers into the Colony, and no doubt in the mind of Governor Spottswood there was suggested the possibility of following up his exploration to the west through new arrivals in his domain.

When he learned that these German immigrants were in distress and unable to pay for their transportation, he entered into an agreement with them, according to which he advanced the money needed to pay their indebtedness to the shipmaster, and they on their part became his servants for a term of eight years. They proved to be hard and burdensome years, like those of Jacob, full of many hardships and deprivations, and when they were over these Lutheran redemptioners, as they were called, freed from the enthralling service, migrated forty miles farther west, where they patented land on the banks of the Robinson River and White Oak Run, now in Madison County, Virginia. This was in the year 1725."
When they arrived in 1717, there were twenty families with about eighty members. . . By 1725 there were at least forty families. Accessions were constantly received and the people multiplied and prospered. At one time one hundred seventy-six attended communion in their newly built Church. Soon the Colony began to swarm and sent large numbers to different parts of Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and the Northwest."


News about the desire of Gov. Spottswood reached the ears of one Adam Miller (Miller) of Lancaster County, Pa., who made a long journey to investigate free lands and unmeasured valleys. After an active canvass on his return home in 1726 or 1727 a large party migrated through the Cumberland Valley north of the Potomac River, crossed at a point west of Harper’s Ferry and entered the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Following an Indian trail along the western side of the Blue Ridge and east of Massanutten Mountain, they settled on the South Fork of the Shenandoah on the banks of Massanutten Creek.

From Maryland, New Jersey, and New York others followed. Germans settled as many as five valleys as far west as Patterson’s Creek, with the largest number entering the Eastern Valley drained by the two forks of the Shenandoah River. Until it was discontinued a number of years ago, Peaked Mountain Church, near McGaheysville, was one of the oldest with records dating as far back as 1750.

About 1750 Justus Henkel moved from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. His sons aided in establishing first Rockingham County, and then Pendleton County. Paul was the first to settle in the Shenandoah Valley about 1774. He became the first regular Pastor of Rader Congregation in June 1792, and served until 1798. The first sermon he preached in “old Rader’s Church” was on Wednesday, December 6, 1782. This sermon and others must have been delivered before he was licensed as a regular pastor. He was licensed to preach June 16, 1783, and ordained as a pastor, June 6, 1792. Just who organized the congregation or who served it as the first Lutheran pastor is not known.

The exact date of the beginning of Rader Evangelical Lutheran Church is uncertain. Reliable sources set 1765 as the earliest date for the congregation, the date on the original deed upon which the first building was constructed. Before this date it is likely that early German settlers gathered in some log hut or school house, and, guarded from Indians and wild animals, bowed to worship Almighty God. No doubt a sermon in the German language was read by someone thoughtful enough to have included a manuscript among his possessions. Privations and hardships were many but rich has been the heritage of those who have entered into the fruits of their labors.

“"The Meeting House", as the first building was called, stood upon land given by two generous families, that of Adam Rader and Alexander Painter. In the words of the deed, “"The said Adam Rader and Alexander Painter for divers good causes and considerations thereunto moving, but more especially for the glory of God, and the spreading of His precious Gospel have given . . . one certain small quantity of land lying and being in Augusta County, Virginia (this section being a part of Augusta County at that time), for the building of a church house or proper place to meet to worship God in."

The deed was made to Peter Scholl in behalf of the Presbyterian Church (today known as Trinity United Church of Christ of Timberville, and previously known as the Reformed Church. This is a common error found in many of the deeds of the former Reformed Church) and Michael Niece in behalf of the Lutheran Church. The deed includes two acres of land to construct a union church.

""Forever, as long as the sun shines and the water flows" are words in the deed that express its good and pious intentions. As the deed states their desire was "to promote the peace and love of said congregations in the fear of God and to promote godliness in the place." The original deed still exists.

After the Rev. Paul Henkel was no longer pastor, the congregation had no regular pastor until 1829. Among the supplies were the Rev. Johannes Voltz, the Rev. Paul Henkel, the Rev. Adam Miller and the Rev. Philip Henkel, until the Rev. Ambrose Henkel became the second regular pastor and served until 1837. For about sixty-four years, from 1765 until 1829, there had been only one regular pastor, the Rev. Paul Henkel, who had been ordained in June, 1792, and served for a period of six years, until 1798.

The prevailing language at the time of organization was German. It was used until about 1888. Dates for the build-
ing of the first and second churches are not known, but they were constructed in the name of Rader Church of logs on the west side of the surfaced road that goes near the present church. The third was a log building, constructed in 1806 on the west side of the road.

About 1878 Lutheran and Reformed people dissolved partnership and the Lutherans purchased the one-half interest of the Reformed. They purchased land on the east side of the road and constructed, during the pastorate of the Rev. John S. Bennick, the building that burned August 13, 1942.

The Reformed congregation moved into Timberville and constructed what is known today as Trinity United Church of Christ. About 1919 more land was added to that originally purchased on the east side of the road. Part of it is used for a cemetery and part for parking. In January 1960, Mr. Russell J. May donated an adjoining acre of land on which a new parish parsonage was constructed jointly with St. John's and St. Paul's churches of the parish.

During the pastorate of the Rev. A. W. Ballentine a new roof was placed on the fourth church building, a hot air furnace was installed, and a separate parish house was constructed, costing approximately a thousand dollars. During the pastorate of the Rev. S. Wallace Berry this building was replastered inside, nine new rooms added for the Sunday Church School, the chancel reconstructed, new memorial windows installed, double choir stalls provided, new floor laid, pews reworked and painted, new carpet placed, exterior of the church painted, belfry repaired, and baluster erected at a cost of some $4,500.00. The building was re-dedicated September 1, 1940, with sermon by the Rev. R. Homer Anderson, D. D., Superintendent of the Lutheran Synod of Virginia. The building was completed in July, 1944, after some 15 months of hard work and devotion.

Total cost of the building was $35,500 in addition to much free labor and contributed materials. Insurance on the old church was only $7,500. Appraisers informed the Church Council in 1964 that at least $125,000 would be required to replace the present building at today's prices. The building is of Gothic architecture throughout with Lutheran appointments. It is constructed of brick and cinder block in the form of a cross. There are three rooms back of the chancel, a nursery room to the left of the main entrance, several rooms, a large social hall, completely furnished kitchen, rest rooms, and furnace room downstairs. Twenty-five memorial windows, pulpit chairs, chancel furniture, and pews were given.

Dedication of the present building was held on September 24, 1944. The sermon at the 11 a.m. service was by the Rev. Charles J. Smith, D.D., L.L.D., President of Roanoke College, who spoke on the topic, "Whose Church Is This?" The Service of Dedication took place at 2:30 o'clock in the afternoon, led by R. Homer Anderson, D.D., who spoke on the topic, "The Christ of Experience." In the dedication he was assisted by Dr. Smith and Pastor Berry.

Since that happy day in 1944 when the church was dedicated, a new oil furnace has replaced the coal furnace. During the time the Rev. Luke L. Linebarger was pastor a "Parish News" sheet was started that goes into the homes of the three churches and into many other homes; the congregation adopted the "Service Book and Hymnal" as its book of worship; a new carpet was placed in the aisles and in the chancel; a new Baldwin electric organ was given by Mr. George H. Branner in memory of his son, Sidney, and plans were studied for a new parsonage for the three churches of the parish.
Prior to 1920 the Parish had no parsonage. When the Rev. J. Paul Stirewalt, D.D., who lived in New Market, resigned to retire from the active ministry, the people realized the need for a parsonage. It was constructed in Timberville under leadership of the following committee: W. J. Tusing from St. Paul’s; B. F. Bowers from St. John’s; F. M. Bowman, S. A. Shutters, George F. Bull, and E. M. Minnick from Rader. S. A. Shutters was elected chairman and E. M. Minnick, secretary and treasurer of the building committee. Work began in the fall of 1919 and it was occupied in November, 1920.

On August 30, 1959, the congregation voted to sell the old parsonage in Timberville, and construct a new one, in cooperation with St. John’s and St. Paul’s churches of the parish. An acre of land for that purpose was given by Russell J. May whose land adjoins Rader Church property. Ground for the new parsonage was broken in January, 1960, and in July of that same year Pastor L. E. Bouknight and family moved in, after having lived in the old parsonage from October until July. The old parsonage was sold in May of 1960.

The building committee consisted of the following: Ray H. Holsinger, Mrs. L. Rudolph Moomaw, and Omer Fahrney from St. Paul’s; David F. Spitzer, Luke W. Dove, and Mrs. Loy H. Crider from St. John’s; and Ralph L. Gladwell, Miss Arlene Knupp, Ervin L. Simmers, J. B. Minnich, Harry D. Spitzer, and Mrs. John M. Branner from Rader. Ralph L. Gladwell was elected chairman and Miss Arlene Knupp was elected treasurer. Cost was $25,860.25 with improvements added since that have brought it to approximately $25,000, plus the value of the lot. The three churches shared in it on the basis of 80% for Rader, 10% for St. Paul’s, and 10% for St. John’s.

A Service of Dedication was held at the 11 a.m. service on October 30, 1960, with the Rev. Charles G. Tusing, Secretary of the Synod, bringing the message and leading in the Service of Dedication that followed. Open house was held that same afternoon from 2:30 p.m. until 5 p.m.

On February 5, 1964, a marker was erected in the old part of the Cemetery bearing the following inscription:

"Adam Reider and Alexander Painter For the Glory of God and The Spreading of His Precious Gospel Have Given a Small Quantity of Land For the Building of a Church House To Worship God Forever As Long As The Sun Shines And The Water Runs To Promote Peace and Love."

Adam Reider  Alexander Painter
Ann Reider  Margaret Painter

It was erected through the interest of Mrs. William A. Watt, Sr. of Thomasville, Ga., a descendant of Adam Reider and wife, who secured the funds from other descendants and interested people whose names are recorded in the minutes of the congregation.

New lights have been installed in the church, new offering plates and brass receiving basin given, a credence bracket installed, and other improvements. Most of these have been gifts by individuals or organizations.

Records show that the Sunday Church School with unionistic tendencies was organized in 1870, but only continued during the summer months. At some date between 1885 and 1890, a Lutheran Sunday School was organized, under direction of the Church Council, with Casper J. Tusing as the Superintendent. In later years a Vacation Church School was promoted. The Sunday School is now divided into a Children’s Department, and a Young People-Adult Department. The new curriculum, in so far as it was introduced by the Lutheran Church in America, in September, 1964, has recently been introduced.

The Women’s Missionary Society and the Aid Society was organized as one organization during the pastorate of the Rev. V. L. Fulmer. It continued until the pastorate of the Rev. A. W. Ballentine, when the organization separated and formed two societies. Later they became the Women of the Church in one organization, then the United Lutheran Church Women, and now the Lutheran Church Women.

The first Luther League was organized in 1923, under the leadership of the supply pastor, the Rev. L. Grady Cooper. In 1938, it became a Parish Luther League to include young people from Rader and St. John’s Churches. More recently it has included members from all three churches of the parish as the Timberville Parish Luther League.

“The Light Brigade” was organized during the pastorate of the Rev. A. W. Ballentine. Later it became the Children of The Church until that organization was discontinued by the former United Lutheran Church in America.

The Lutheran Church Men was organized also at some date during these years, but no exact date is known as to its beginning at the time this sketch is being prepared.
It was first known as the Brotherhood, and later as the Lutheran Church Men. It was organized to include men from the three churches, but not all the churches have always participated.

These organizations are of more recent years, but they have had an important role in the life and work of the congregation. In all their efforts they have shown great Christian zeal and devotion in the promotion of our Lord's Kingdom.

The following Pastors have served Rader Congregation:

There are no records to show who was pastor when the church was organized in 1765 or possibly before.

The Rev. Paul Henkel, Licensed, June 16, 1783
Ordained, June 6, 1792, served until 1798

The Rev. Ambrose Henkel, 1829 - July, 1837
The Rev. Jacob Stirewalt, August 6, 1837 - 1839
The Rev. Ambrose Henkel, 1839 - 1855
The Rev. Socrates Henkel, 1855 - August, 1858
The Rev. Jacob Stirewalt, August 6, 1858 - August 6, 1869

The Rev. John S. Bennick, August, 1869 - 1881
The Rev. J. Paul Stirewalt, D.D., March 1, 1882 - December 31, 1919

The Rev. Verley L. Fulmer, June, 1920 - August, 1922

The Rev. L. L. Lohr, D.D., September 16, 1923 - November, 1925
The Rev. A. W. Ballentine, October 1, 1927 - June 30, 1937
The Rev. S. Wallace Berry, S.T.M., February 15, 1938 - August 31, 1951

The Rev. Louis E. Bouknight, November 1, 1959 - Present Pastor

The following pastors were confirmed in Rader Church, namely, the Rev. John S. Bennick, the Rev. J. Paul Stirewalt, the Rev. M. Luther Pence, the Rev. Charles H. Pence, the Rev. Arthur M. Pence, the Rev. M. A. Ashby, the Rev. Luther Ballentine, and the Rev. Richard A. Berry.

The history of Rader Evangelical Lutheran Church is written into the lives of all who have sacrificed, prayed, and labored for more than two hundred years. As we enter our third century, under the leadership of the great Head of the Church, we know that many more will sacrifice, pray, and labor into the future that even greater work may be done by those "strong in the strength which God supplies." "Not by might, nor by power, by My Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts." (Deut. 4:6)
Marker, erected on February 5, 1964, in the old Rader Church cemetery, in memory of Adam Reider, Ann Reider, Alexander Painter and Margaret Painter, who donated the original land for the Rader church.

The new parsonage of the Timberville Lutheran Parish, located near Rader church and jointly owned by Rader, St. John’s and St. Paul’s churches, of the Timberville Lutheran Parish, which was dedicated on October 30, 1960.

The old Timberville Lutheran Parish parsonage in Timberville, constructed in 1920 and sold in 1960.
The Rev. A. W. Ballentine, Pastor from October 1, 1927, to June 30, 1937.

The Rev. S. Wallace Berry, STM, Pastor from February 15, 1938, to

The Rev. James K. Cobb, Pastor from December 1951, to August


The Rev. Louis E. Bouknight, Pastor since November 1, 1959.