

# HISTORY

OF

# BERKS COUNTY

IN

PENNSYLVANIA.

BY

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MEMBER OF THE BERKS COUNTY BAR.

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PHILADELPHIA:

EVERTS, PECK & RICHARDS.

1886.

century by Andrew Weiler. He sold out to Reuben Trexler, who was succeeded by his son William, the present owner. About one thousand hides per year are tanned. The old Wagenhorst mill occupies the next site on this stream, being near the county line. The improvements antedate the century and were made by John Wagenhorst. The present mill has been improved and is still operated by the Wagenhorst family. On the West Branch of the Little Lehigh Peter Hawerter had improved a site upon which he erected a fulling-mill, and later a feed-mill was added, the present owner being Morgan Long. Below this site there was a tannery of Valentine Geist, last operated by Benjamin Hawerter. The buildings remain, but the business has long since been discontinued. Above was the saw-mill of George Fritch, which was next carried on by Nathan Fritch.

**PAINT-MILL.**—The power above was made to operate a grist-mill for the Fritch family, but in 1884 this was converted into a paint-mill by T. L. Fritch & Bros. This has become one of the most important industries in the township. The firm mines and manufactures floated ochres, umbers and metallic paints, producing at the rate of one thousand barrels per month, and employing from ten to fifteen hands. The water-power has been supplemented by steam, so that operations can be carried on continuously. A specialty is made of raw and burnt umber, the mineral being found near by twenty feet below the surface and having a thickness of forty feet. The improvement above was made by John Butz, to operate a clover-mill, which has been idle a long time.

In the southwestern part of the township, on a branch of the Sacony, on the site of the old Schnable mills are the Leshner grist and saw-mills, now operated by John Long. The power is weak and the mills are old.

Near the Lehigh County line were the grist and saw-mills of John Keifer, which have been replaced by better and larger mills, operated by water and steam-power and owned by Ed. Mickley and Perry Wannamaker. This firm also has a large slaughter-house where from ten to thirty steers per week are killed. The locality is known as Maple Grove. Nearly west of this

place was the oil-mill of Jacob Wagenhorst, which had a wide reputation. The building is still standing, but is not in use.

At Hancock a paint-mill was begun in the fall of 1884 by Henry S. Weiler and S. Long & Son, which is still operated by them in the manufacture of crude ochres, the material for which is procured at some of the iron-mines in the township. The mill has a capacity of thirty barrels per day, and the products are in good demand.

**PLUMBAGO.**—In 1880 William Reiley & Co. built a plumbago-factory on the land of William Long, which was operated one year, when the building was destroyed by fire. The plumbago there found is of good quality when properly prepared.

**WHITE CLAY.**—On the lands of David De-long are beds of clay, almost pure white, which has been found well adapted for the use of paper-makers. Its development and manufacture was begun in 1876 by William Reiley & Co. who put up works for that purpose. These, in an enlarged condition, are now carried on by the "Star Clay Company," of which J. B. Wilson is the manager. Steam-power is employed and ten men are engaged in the various stages of manufacture.

In no township of the county is iron-ore more abundant than in Longswamp. Nearly every farm is underlaid with it and as many as one hundred mines have been opened. In most of the larger mines steam-power has been employed and within two miles of Mertztown forty engines have been in operation for this purpose.

#### CHURCHES.

**LONGSWAMP CHURCH.**<sup>1</sup>—Frederick Hoelwig, the cantor (the director of church music) of the congregation, certifies in his chronicle. Certain members of the Reformed congregation in Longswamp, after the command of God, declared that they would erect a church, and they began about September, 1748. The piece of ground which the members had selected was lawfully secured by Jost H. Sassamanhausen through

<sup>1</sup> Extracts taken from Allentown *Friedensbote*, translated by the author and published in *Reading Daily News*, April 21-24, 1885.

a warrant. Afterwards the congregation bought nine acres in addition for the purpose of erecting a school-house thereon and for the use of the school-teacher. Both tracts were patented for the perpetual use of the Reformed congregation, which was not a union one originally, but so hard Reformed that the Lutherans who came afterward were pressed farther down into the valley, where they likewise established a congregation on the Little Lehigh.

The first church was erected about the year 1748. The members selected as master-builders (building committee) Joseph Biry and Samuel Burger. These said—as Hoelwig said in his chronicle—“with the help” of other members of the congregation, who had given contributions and whose names follow, the building was finished :

Leopold Kreber.	Nicholas Kaiser.
Theobald Karl.	Peter Kaiser.
Jacob Fenstermacher.	Peter Walbert.
John Fried.	Bernhard Fegley.
Peter Butz.	Jost Henry Sassaman-
Nicholas Schwartz.	hausen.
Nicholas Mertz.	Henry Stricker.
David Mertz.	Jacob Long.
Peter Mertz.	David Delong.
Henry Bohlinger.	Henry Eigner.
Christian Ruth.	Jacob Daniel Volk.
Philip Burger.	

At the lower northern corner of the graveyard, several paces inward from the present wall, the old church was erected. -

The second church was built under the church administration of Hertzell. The first church stood forty-three years. In this time the congregation increased in number so that the old little church became too small, and the well-being had also grown so much that the members thought that they could build a more corresponding church. In 1790 preparations were made for the new building. Then it happened, as it generally happens in the building of a church where there are many heads, each one would have their own way, and each one considered that he is right; so they disagreed where the church should be built. The place where the old church stood was not suitable any longer in the opinion of many. It was said that it should be built higher up the hill, and yet they did not

wish to leave the old church-yard. So they came to pass “the throwing of hats.” This was an old custom among the Germans, which was generally practiced when differences arose concerning matters of a congregation. By throwing their hats down upon the place that they thought was the proper place they expressed their opinion, and they were satisfied according to the majority of opinion. This was regarded as a holy election, which decision was submitted to by each one, whether it happened to be for or against him. So it happened here. Each one threw his hat upon the place where he was most pleased to have it. The hats were then counted and it was ascertained that the upper western corner had the most hats. Then a beautiful walled terrace was erected there and the commencement of the church building was made in a practical and united manner. The corner-stone was laid May 28, 1791, and Hertzell, the then minister, preached.

John Helfrich, a son of the deceased Rev. Helfrich, was then elected pastor of the congregation. In autumn, 1816, he began to preach after he had received his license from Synod. By his election dissatisfaction arose. Other ministers tried to become elected and did all they could to make good their application. The consequences were that the minds of the congregation became excited and thereby Helfrich's election became more decided. In the course of time many Lutherans settled in the vicinity of the congregation through buying and selling and reciprocal family connections. These organized themselves into a congregation and petitioned the Reformed members to be allowed to hold religious services in their church on condition that they paid a small rent. The rigid Reformed spirit of the parents had partly died out, and the Lutherans were willingly allowed. They elected the Rev. Jacob Miller in 1817, he who was compensated for a short time by his brother, Conrad Miller.

The church was rented by the Lutherans at a nominal rent for a definite term. After this term expired it was re-rented under similar conditions. At the third re-renting a difference arose which brought a separation. Under the administration of Pastor Roeller, who was the

Lutheran minister about this time, the year 1837 found the greatest number of Lutherans brought together: They resolved to build their own church and founded the Mertztown congregation, near by the Longswamp. A small number of the Reformed members went with the Lutherans, and so the Mertztown congregation became a union congregation. But a small number of the Lutherans also remained with the Old Longswamp Church and were given the right to carry on worship therein without rent. And so this church also became union.

In the year 1848, after the congregation had existed for more than one hundred years, they decided to celebrate the event by a jubilee. The church was beautifully ornamented with flowers and crosses and the festival was held on the 30th of September and the 1st of October. This was the first centennial festival which was held in this vicinity. The festival sermons were preached by Dr. J. S. Kessler, Eichenberg and Brobst. From near and far people came to witness this immense festival.

In 1852 the second church was torn down for the purpose of erecting in its stead, in the vicinity, a new and more spacious one. The corner-stone was laid on the 9th of May. Dechant and both ministers of the congregation preached upon this occasion. On Christmas of this year the church was dedicated. Schmid, Brobst, Hinterleitner and other ministers preached. The church is a tasteful building, with a steeple and bell. This was the first steeple in this district for miles round-about, and the bell the first which, with its brass tongue and resounding tone, called the congregation together from the extensive valley to the service of God.

The Reformed ministers who preached in Longswamp Church were,—

Frederick Casimir Miller.  
Philip Jacob Michael.  
Rudolph Reidenweile.  
G. H. Helfrich.  
Henry Hertzell.  
J. Henry Helfrich, 1795-1810.  
W. Dechant, 1811-15.  
John Helfrich, 1816-52.  
W. A. Helfrich, 1852-85.

The Lutheran ministers of the congregation

from 1817 were Jacob Miller, Conrad Miller and Isaac Roeller. After the separation, in 1837, the following ministers preached: Augustus Griebler, Peter Oberfeld, Jeremiah Schindel, P. Hinterleitner, Ferdinand Berke-meyer, C. H. M. Sell, A. Croll, S. R. Boyer and D. K. Humbert.

The trustees in 1885 were Nathan Haas, Manoah Long and William Schubert; and then the Reformed congregation had three hundred members, and the Lutheran two hundred.

The church property now comprises forty acres of land.

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH (Reformed and Lutheran) is located at Mertztown. It is a brick edifice, forty-four by fifty-six feet, with galleries on three sides; and it includes two acres of ground, most of which is used for cemetery purposes. The church was erected in 1837 by a building committee composed of Daniel Ginging, Jonas Trexler, Jonathan Haas and John Diener.

The Reformed congregation was organized by the Rev. Charles Herman, who was its first pastor, and the Rev. William Helfrich next. The present pastor is the Rev. J. Sassaman Herman. The members number about one hundred and fifty. Of the Lutheran congregation, the Rev. Isaac Roeller was the first pastor, and had here, as in other parts of the county, the Rev. B. E. Kramlich as his successor. His congregation is large, numbering three hundred members.

A large Sunday-school is maintained in the church. In 1885 Benneville Fegeley was superintendent.

SALEM CHURCH (Evangelical Association) was erected at Shamrock in 1870. It is a plainly-built frame building, put up by a committee composed of James Weida, Daniel Shirey and the Rev. Frank Sechrist, who was at that time the preacher in charge of Kutztown Circuit, which has supplied the ministerial service of the church. The membership has never been large, the aggregate in 1885 being only twenty-five persons. Ephraim Fegeley is the superintendent of the Sunday-school, which has about seventy-five members.

ST. PETER'S CHURCH (Reformed and Lu-