

A HISTORY OF
Wills Creek Charge

of the

EVANGELICAL AND
REFORMED CHURCH

By REV. J. E. GINDLESPERGER



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Wills Creek Charge

CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHARGE

Three of the four congregations composing this Charge have a long and varied history dating back to about the year 1800. They are: St. Mark's (formerly Greenville); written records date back to the year 1810. This indicates that the congregation existed there a number of years before that date. Grace (formerly called White Oak, and before that Reichards) was in existence as early as 1819, for on that date a promise was made by a John Wells to give a tract of land for church and school purposes to sundry citizens of Greenville and Southampton townships. This would also indicate that a congregation, or congregations, existed there for some years previous to that date. Mt. Lebanon's (formerly called Fichtner, and before that Mull's) written records date to the year 1834. History records the fact that a church building was erected two miles northeast of the present site in 1829. History also states that previous to the erection of the church building, services were held in various homes in the community as early as 1805. The fourth congregation of the Charge, Glencoe, is an offspring of the Mt. Lebanon congregation. During the history of these congregations they have been a part of five Charges as follows:

THE BERLIN CHARGE—1795-1833

When Rev. Henry Giese took up the work in the Berlin Charge in 1795, it was composed of the following congregations: Berlin, Glade, Shanksville, Stoystown, Friedens, Somerset, Samuel's, New Centerville, Sanner's, Salisbury, Wellersburg, and possibly others. (See "History of Somerset Classis"). He served this Charge for a period of thirty-eight years. It was during this period that the above named congregations of the Wills Creek Charge came into existence.

There can be no doubt that Rev. Giese was the founder of these congregations, although there is no documentary evidence substantiating this. Two undisputed facts point to him as their founder: first, they came into existence during his pastorate in the Charge, and second, he was the only Reformed pastor in all the region now covered by Somerset Classis. A third might be added: these congregations lay along the route of travel to and from Berlin to Wellersburg, which were two important congregations in the Charge. Rev. Giese served regularly in both these congregations; and being the pastor he was, he would not have passed up the opportunity to establish new congregations whenever and wherever possible.

From their beginning these congregations were a part of the Berlin Charge, and remained so connected until the retirement of Rev. Giese in 1833. Rev. Giese did not serve them continuously during the later years of his pastorate as his field was too large to permit that. From the year 1818 to the end of his pastorate, he secured other pastors to assist him in the work of the Charge.

The first one of these, of which there is record, was Rev. J. H. Kieffer who was stationed at Somerset during the years 1818-1825. He also assisted at Greenville and Wellersburg. At Greenville he is credited with fully organizing the congregation in 1820. Whether he ever visited and served at White Oak and Mull's is not known, as there are no written records of that period in either congregation available.

The second assistant to Rev. Giese was Rev. H. E. F. Voigt during the years 1827-1829. His name appears on the records of both Greenville and White Oak at this time. It is not unlikely that he also served at Mull's during these years, but there is no documentary evidence at hand substantiating this fact. He also served other congregations, among them Wellersburg, in this area; and later became the celebrated Father Voigt of the Westmoreland Classis. The congregations of the Wills Creek Charge are proud of the fact that he was once their pastor.

The third assistant to Rev. Giese was Rev. H. G. Ibbeken, who served at White Oak during the last two years of Rev. Giese's pastorate in the Berlin Charge. Whether he served at Greenville and Mull's during 1831-1833 is not clear, but evidently he did so. He also served at Wellersburg and Gladden's Run during this time. Since he served three of the five congregations in this area, it can be supposed that he served the other two as well.

Upon the resignation of Rev. Giese from the pastorate of the Berlin Charge, and his subsequent retirement in 1833, the Charge was divided, forming the two Charges of Berlin and Somerset. The Berlin Charge now consisted of Berlin, Glade, Shanksville, Stoystown, New Centerville, Sanner's, Salisbury, and Grantsville.

THE SOMERSET CHARGE—1833-1846

After the retirement of Rev. Henry Giese in 1833, Somerset Charge was formed consisting of Somerset, Samuel's, Wellersburg, Gladden's, White Oak, Greenville, and Mull's. Later other congregations were added. Rev. H. G. Ibbeken was the first pastor. He had served in a number of these congregations during 1831-1833 as an assistant to Rev. Giese, and upon the organization of the Somerset Charge took over the work as its first pastor.

Concerning the congregations of the Wills Creek Charge, Rev. Ibbeken

served at White Oak as pastor from 1833 to 1844. At Greenville he was the pastor in 1833, but it is uncertain how long he continued to serve; and at Mull's he was pastor from 1834 to 1837, when he was relieved by Rev. William Conrad for a short time. After Rev. Conrad's short pastorate at Mull's, Rev. Ibbeken served as pastor for about a year and a half until he died, February 8, 1844, at the age of 43 years. He was buried at Somerset.

After the death of Rev. H. G. Ibbeken in 1844, the congregations in the Wellersburg end of the Charge evidently remained without a pastor for more than two years. While Rev. David B. Ernst was pastor of the Somerset Charge, there is no record of his work in the churches of the Wills Creek Charge. It was not until a new Charge was formed that they received regular services again.

THE WELLERSBURG CHARGE—1846-1873

In 1846, Wellersburg, Greenville, White Oak, Mull's, and Gladden's were taken from the Somerset Charge to constitute the Wellersburg Charge. Rev. Benjamin Knepper became the first pastor. Soon he established a congregation at Fink's, and preaching points at J. Wagaman's (later known as "Shroyer's") in Bedford County, at A. Wagaman's one mile south of Mt. Lebanon near the site of the present Wagaman school-house, and at South Mills (Southampton Mills) one mile northeast of Glencoe. During the next twenty-five years little change took place in the construction of the Charge.

When Rev. Benjamin Knepper began the work in the Charge in 1846, he reported the membership in the churches as follows: Mull's, 9; Greenville, 13; and White Oak, 11. Under his ministry the membership of these congregations grew steadily during the following twenty-five years.

During this period a number of men stand out very prominently in the work of the church. In the Greenville congregation it was men like Jacob Lint, Jeremiah Glotfelty, and others. (See congregational sketch). These men were the pillars around which the church was built.

In the White Oak congregation such men as Solomon Engle, Peter Reiber, Jonathan Bittner, Adam Lepley, Jeremiah Shockey, and others, played a very important part in establishing the work there.

In the Mull's congregation such men as Jacob Poorbaugh, Samuel Poorbaugh, John Poorbaugh, Andrew Wagaman, Valentine Bridigum, and others, were prominent in the work of that congregation. These men later distinguished themselves, along with others, in the Fichtner and Mt. Lebanon congregations which succeeded Mull's congregation. The Mull's church was located on the old Andrew Bridigum farm, now owned and operated by Moses Leister. The old site of the church is now clearly marked by the cemetery which surrounded it.

