

The History of the Old Manor Church

Denmark Manor United Church traces its beginning back to June 3, 1811. On this date the cornerstone for "Old Manor" was laid. The name, Denmark Manor, however, was in existence much earlier. This was the name of a fertile valley. On a hill overlooking this valley "Old Manor" was built.

In the 17th century the King of England gave a large tract of land to William Penn, a Quaker, as payment for a debt owed to his father. It was his wish that this land would be for people who were suffering from religious persecution. At first Penn was cautious about settling this land and he required that the Native Americans be paid by the settlers to avoid any bloodshed. The land was surveyed and divided into choice plots that were called Manors. For every ten acres sold the Penn family reserved one acre for themselves. One of these choice plots was Denmark Manor and it was called "The Manor of Denmark" hoping to attract Danish people to the area. The Germans and Pennsylvania Dutch, however, came to the area.

These settlers were either German Reformed or Lutheran in their religious beliefs. Both churches grew out of the Reformation, both had suffered religious persecution and both had come to America in large groups. A common practice in America and Europe was that these two groups worship together. They spoke the same language and their liturgy was similar. These churches were known as "union churches". Old Manor was a union church.

Rev. John William Weber, a pioneer minister and missionary, came from the eastern part of Pennsylvania to Westmoreland County in the late 1700's. One original congregation he established was the Brush Creek Church in 1773. This was the center of worship for Reformed families in the surrounding areas for years. It was here that people from the Manor Valley traveled for services. Some people traveled 15 or 20 miles to worship.

As families became larger, more people moved into the valley and traveling became more difficult it was evident that there was a need for a local church. In December of 1809 a committee consisting of Reformed members Paul Neleigh and Adam Kemerer and Lutheran member Christian Eberhart was named. Jacob Brinker (Reformed) and Michael Fink (Lutheran) were made "bezahlmeisters" or treasurers.

The first tasks were to raise money and find suitable land. Most of the people at that time were comparatively poor. They had plenty of land but few comforts. Money was scarce and raising money for such an undertaking was not easy. Members of the congregation Jacob Brinker and Conrad Knappenberger gave land for the building of the church. Additional land was later purchased from Paul Brinker and Jacob Lauffer to include a school house and a burial ground. It is said that the original document stated "that this land shall forever remain for church and school purposes till the end of the world."

It was two years after the committee met that work on the church began. Rev. Steck and Rev. Weber officiated at the laying of the cornerstone on June 3, 1811. Michael Fink's cash book shows that the free-will offering of the people on that occasion amounted to \$99.08. This was a very liberal offering in those days and it shows the deep interest of the worshippers. In 1811 a contract for erecting the wall and laying the brick was given to Paul Henkel for the sum of \$225. Two years later a contract for carpenter work, painting, and glazing was awarded to Paul Dry for \$600. The progress of building was very slow. A statement made at the hundredth anniversary was the difficulties we can hardly imagine had to be faced and solved. The building was completed on June 7, 1815 and the debt

incurred was not fully paid until 1825. This period of time suggests the difficulties, burdens, and sacrifices the members had to make.

The original membership was 15 or 20 and the congregation was served by Rev. John William Weber. For its day it was a church of which they would be justly proud. It was made of brick and was built on a solid stone foundation. The building measured 38 X 46 feet in size.

The biggest drawback was that there was no means of heating the building. Whether this was an error or just the design there was no means of heating the building. It has been said that members may have objected to having stoves in their churches. During severely cold weather the congregation met in the nearby school house. Rev. N. P. Hacke said this of the school house, "The school house was often used as a church and was in very deed a sheep fold. During the time there was no school it was a convenient retreat for the neighbor's sheep." Over burdened recitation benches used by the school children often gave way and deposited worshippers on the floor causing interruption and embarrassment.

The interior of the building had separate seating sections for men and women. The younger people sat in the second-story balcony. The lectern was located on the first floor level, and the pulpit several steps higher.

Several attempts were made to solve the heating problem. First a pipe was run through a broken window and then one on either side of the pulpit. With this the minister received most of the heat and on windy days both minister and congregation were nearly suffocated from the smoke. Finally when a shingled roof caught fire from a pipe that was put through the rafters a chimney was built. The following is a quote taken from the program of the 125th anniversary program. "We must remember that our first "Old Manor" was dedicated to the cause of Reformed and Lutheran congregations, was a humble building and exemplified the spirit of the ones who faithfully journeyed there for worship service.

For many years services were conducted in German. English was introduced into services in a small degree at first, then more and more until the German language died out. It wasn't until the 1880's that this was true.

"Old Manor", as it was affectionately called, served the two denominations for 76 years. After 76 years of use the church became dilapidated. Also the style of the church's architecture and equipment was not harmonious with the modern church architecture and customs. A desire to build a new church was strong. The first question was should this be a union church or should the congregations separate. Several votes were taken. Bitterness was apparent. Finally on September 10, 1887 at a joint meeting held in the church it was decided to separate.

It has been said that a conflict evolved around the conservative ideas of the Lutherans and the progressiveness of the of the Reforms. A committee was formed and it was resolved to hold a public auction of the property. On October 8, 1887 the land was sold at auction with the bid going to the Reformed Church. The Lutherans moved to Boquet and built their church. The next spring Old Manor was torn down.

Submitted by our Church Historian, Sylvia Duncan