

Early Rowan County Lutheran Churches

The early migration of German immigrants from Pennsylvania into Rowan County, North Carolina, dates to about 1743. That is the time that our early ancestors, John Jacob, Christian and Melchior Eller left Germany, by way of Rotterdam, for Philadelphia.

We know that Christian Eller was in Rowan County by 1759 as he was on a list of soldiers mustered to fight hostile Indians.

Why did these young men come to America? The Thirty Year's War and Catholic-Protestant fighting had left much of Germany in ruins. People were starving. And some of the more devout Catholic nobility were punishing the Protestant serfs. There is little doubt poverty was a factor, but it seems clear that our Eller ancestors, who we believe were Lutherans, fled Germany to avoid religious persecution.

So, it is not surprising that once they started to settle in Rowan County, their Church life was of paramount importance.

There are at least three Lutheran Churches around Salisbury that date back to the early German immigrants to Rowan County. And each of those churches appear to have had several names and changed locations.

We believe our Eller ancestors attended the Dutch Peint Meeting House (The Pine Church).

In discussing these early Lutheran churches, we should recognize the role they played in Colonial times went beyond religion. At the time our early Eller ancestors arrived in Rowan County, there were no newspapers in the area (and our earliest ancestors probably read only German, anyway). Farms were widely scattered and education usually was handled by the church.

Sunday's church service was important, of course, as an exercise in faith. But it was also the time when the widely scattered families gathered to exchange news, socialize and organize politically.

The Hickory Church

The "Hickory Meeting House" (or Hickory Church) dates back to at least 1745 and was named for the hickory logs used to construct the building. (At the time it was founded the word "Church" referred only to the official Church of England, or the Episcopal Church. So, these early Lutheran congregations met in "meeting houses.")

The Hickory Church came into existence near Second Creek at the same time as the Lowerstone Reformed Church. Both congregations were of German ancestry. It is likely these two Protestant faiths shared the same building. Apparently neither congregation owned the property where the church was built. There is a marker near St. Peter's Lutheran Church indicating it is the location of the original Hickory Church.

The Organ Church

The Hickory Church moved and evolved into the Zion Lutheran Church and then became Organ Lutheran Church which still exists. The story is that Zion Church had an organ installed sometime before 1786, perhaps the first church organ in the south. And it was forever known as the "church with the organ" or as it is called today, "Organ Lutheran Church."

There is speculation that Hickory Church effectively split to become the Organ Church and the Pine Church.

The Dutch Pine Church

The “Dutch Peint Meeting House” (German for “Pine Meeting House”) is difficult to date. A history of Union Lutheran Church suggests the Dutch Pine Church probably came into existence when the Hickory Church moved and became the Organ Church. (The ‘Dutch’ refers to “Deutsch” or “German.”) However, there are some who believe the Pine Church is much, much older.

By 1771 the “Dutch Pine Church” had become, or was in the process of becoming, “Union Lutheran Church” on Bringle Ferry Road. Union Church’s original building, to the rear of the current cemetery, was of wood construction (perhaps pine?) and may be the location of the Pine Church.

Union Lutheran Church continues to exist in a newer building.

Lutheran Cemetery

I have found references to the “Old German Burial Ground” and wonder if it’s the same thing as the “Old Lutheran Burial Ground” at North Lee and Cemetery Streets in Salisbury.

