

# Carroll History Journal

Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland

## ST. BENJAMIN'S: FROM LOG CABIN TO WHITE CHURCH ON THE HILL

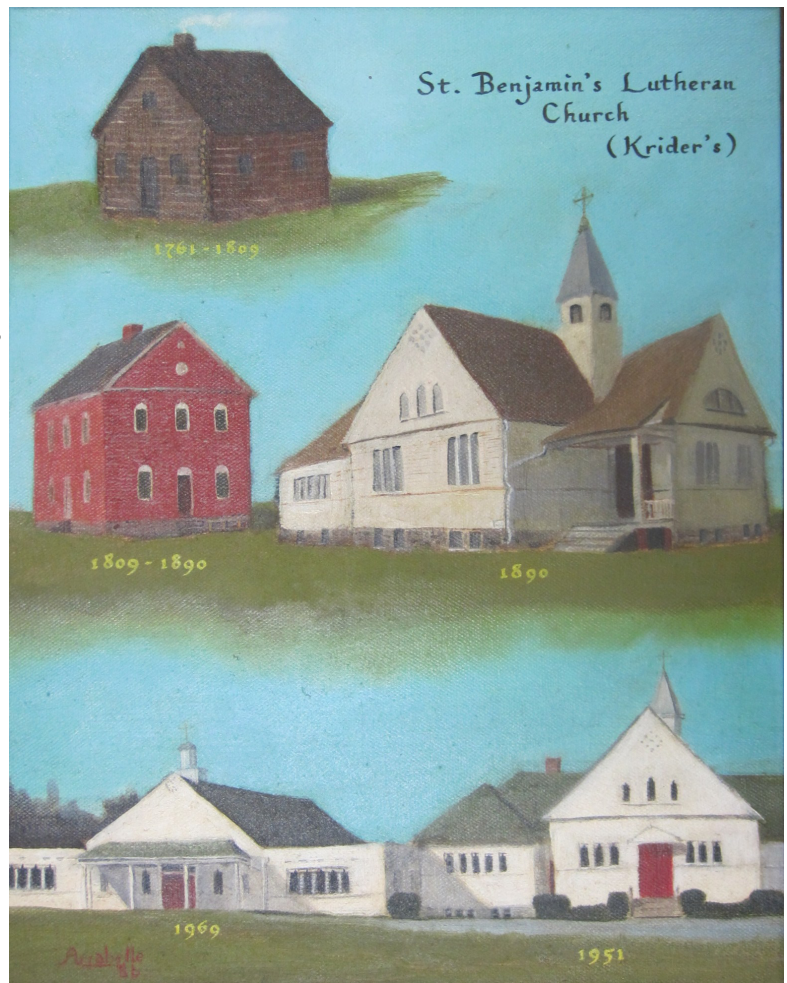
BY LOUISE YOUNG MELEDIN

St. Benjamin's Lutheran Church, founded August 12, 1761, is the second oldest among the more than 20 Lutheran churches in Carroll County. In preparation for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary observances, which would take place throughout 2011, a committee of research mavens delved into the church archives (all those documents accumulated in the basement over the centuries), and uncovered some revelations about our early, as well as our more recent, history. These discoveries led to the highlights of our history in this article, as well as providing the foundation for our historic services throughout our anniversary year.

### Our Beginnings

Between 1545 and 1685, Protestant Electors governed the Palatine region on the lower Rhine in what is now Germany. When the last of these, Karl II, died without an heir, the government passed to his cousin, the Catholic Philip William of Neuburg. Louis XIV of France saw an opportunity to expand his empire and sent troops as part of a plan to annex the fertile Palatine region.

From 1688 to 1720, various wars devastated the newly-Catholic Palatinate, making the political and religious climate intolerable for the pious Lutheran and Reformed farmers. Many of them became part of the second and third waves of German immigration to the British colonies in America. The first wave (1683-1710) had been direct recruits of William Penn and settled not far from the port of Philadelphia where they disembarked. The



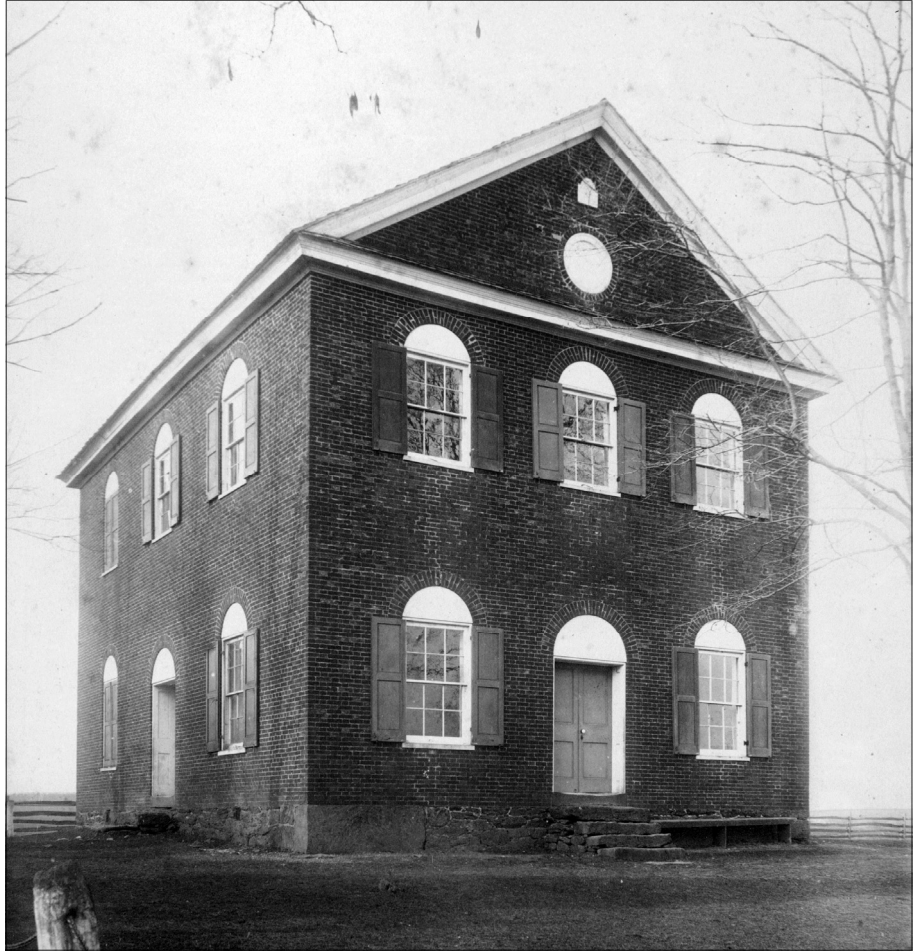
Painting by Arrabelle Frock showing the evolution of St. Benjamin's from the original log building to the current Queen Anne style church.  
Courtesy of St. Benjamin's.

second wave (1710-1727) settled primarily in southeast and south-central Pennsylvania. The third (1727-1776) traveled south from the already

cultivated areas of southern Pennsylvania to find fertile land in Maryland and even Virginia. The French and Indian War, by 1761 raging west of the present Frederick County, encouraged the settlers to stay east of the Monocacy River. Meanwhile, prudent immigrants settled somewhat south of the unsurveyed border between Maryland and Pennsylvania to avoid potential double taxation. Because of these constraints, many of this third influx of German immigrants settled in the area that became the town of Westminster.

The first two priorities of these German farmers were a house and barn. Erecting a church was their third. While the German Lutheran and Reformed settlers clung fast to their respective doctrines and modes of governance, they recognized the benefit of joining together in the construction of one church that would serve both groups of worshipers for their separate services. These became the many “Union” churches of Carroll County.

As early as 1741, several of the fledgling Lutheran congregations in Pennsylvania had written to Germany asking for a pastor to take charge of the scattered Lutheran communities in the mid-Atlantic region. The Francke Foundation at Halle selected Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. Rev. Muhlenberg arrived in 1742, and provided leadership to Lutheran congregations from Georgia to New York. In 1748, he called together the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the first permanent Lutheran synod in America. He helped to prepare a uniform liturgy that same year and also wrote basic tenets for an ecclesiastical constitution, which most of the churches adopted in 1761. He did much work on a hymnal, published in 1786. Rev. Muhlenberg’s 1748 liturgy, which prevailed as the standard for Swedish and Dutch, as well as German, Lutheran congregations for a century, continues to influence the liturgies used



The brick Union Church, 1809–1890. Collection of the Historical Society of Carroll County.

today in Lutheran churches throughout the United States.

### **Original Log Church**

On April 14, 1763, the Lutheran and Reformed congregations at Pfeiff Krick (now known as Little Pipe Creek) agreed to build a joint church, noting that “there have been bought from John Krauter for this Church, two acres of land lying in and around the Church garden and previously called ‘Brown’s Delight’.” Other sources call him Johannes Greider, the German form of the same name. Those names evolved into “Krider,” the version still associated with both congregations, which swore that day to “bind ourselves to each other with the sum of one hundred pounds lawful currency. Either party acting against these Articles and breaking the peace shall immediately pay the other party the aforesaid one hundred pounds.” These monies have remained in





Interior of the brick Union Church showing the balcony, stoves, pipes, and woodwork. Courtesy of St. Benjamin's.

The original "Church Record of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of St. Benjamin's or Krider's Church at Pipe Creek, near Westminster, Md., 1767-1837" is written entirely in German (translated into English in 1935 by Charles T. Zahn). Only on May 27, 1826, does the first reference to English appear in the original record, when 17 worshipers were confirmed in German, two in English.

escrow for 250 years, as the two churches have managed their co-existence and partial separation without breach of the peace.

In 1763, the two congregations built and dedicated their first joint church, a one-and-a-half story log structure. A sexton's house, also built of logs, followed soon after. An early Lutheran membership roll from about 1770 names 31 members. The earliest communion roll, that of May 21, 1775, lists 35 who communed on that date. There is no further record of communion until 1781, when annual communion rolls begin for three years, followed by semi-annual communion rolls beginning in 1784. Presumably the early dearth of communion rolls reflects the rarity of visits by ordained ministers in those years.

The first minister at Krider's Church was Carl Friedrich Wildbahn. He had been serving as a catechist in Winchester, Virginia, but relocated to Conewago (Hanover, Pa.) in 1763 as a result of savage Indian attacks in Winchester. At that time, Hanover was the base for ministers serving Carroll County churches. As early as 1763, Rev. Wildbahn included Krider's in his parish, extending as far as Hagerstown and Sharpsburg and comprising as many as 13 congregations, which he visited on horseback.

### Brick Union Church

By 1809, both the Lutheran and Reformed congregations had outgrown the original log church. They razed it and, on April 13, purchased an additional acre of "Browns Delight" for two dollars from John Benter. The two congregations built their new two-story, brick church, funded by a lottery (a common way to raise money then), on the site of the log church. The architecture of this second Union Church was cut from the mold prevailing in the county at that time. Without placing this vintage of Union Churches in their respective topographies, it is difficult to distinguish one from another. The logs from the original 1763 Union Church were used to build a dwelling which still stands at 114 East Main Street in Westminster. It was about this time that the name "St. Benjamin's" became associated with the Lutheran congregation.

During the early decades of the 19th century, ministers serving St. Benjamin's and its neighboring churches continued to be based in Hanover. In 1831, Rev. Jacob Albert came to Immanuel Church in Manchester (Carroll County's oldest Lutheran Church, founded in 1760) and served five other congregations, including St. Benjamin's. By the time



The St. Benjamin's kerch stone in its place of honor above the door of the 1890 Reformed church (now United Church of Christ). Courtesy of St. Benjamin's.

of the 1839 convention of the Maryland Synod, Immanuel Church had grown to more than a thousand members. The convention recommended that Emmanuel (Baust), St. Benjamin's, and St. Luke's (Winter's) churches form themselves into a separate pastoral district. In 1842 Rev. Philip Willard resigned from the Manchester Charge to serve the new Westminster Charge, consisting of the three recommended churches and St. Mary's in Silver Run. Rev. Willard sometimes preached five times a Sunday, twice in German and three times in English.

With the founding of Grace Church, Westminster, in February 1868, the Westminster Charge grew to five churches. This configuration proved unwieldy, so within a year Winter's and Baust's churches joined with Mt. Union to form a new charge. Grace, St. John's (Leister's), and St. Benjamin's churches remained as the Westminster Charge. In 1886, however, the Westminster Charge was again divided, with St. Benjamin's and St. John's leaving to become the Salem Charge.

## Queen Anne-style Lutheran Church

In 1889, lightning struck the second Union Church, rendering it unsafe. The Lutheran members, who now outnumbered those of the Reformed congregation, decided to build their own, separate church on two and a half acres they bought for \$500 just south of where the Union Church had stood. On June 15, 1890, they laid the cornerstone for a Queen Anne-style church measuring 40' x 48', with an additional Sunday school room on the left side of the building. A week earlier, the Reformed congregation had begun a Gothic-style church several hundred yards to the north. Salvageable materials from the demolished church were divided between the two congregations, with the Lutherans incorporating the old cornerstone in their new foundation and the Reformed members placing the 1809 "Benjamin's Kerch" stone above their new front door. The denominations went their separate ways, although on good terms, as they continued sharing the large, historic cemetery between them. The Lutherans began to refer to their church as St. Benjamin's, while members of the Reformed (later United



Interior of the current church at a Harvest Home service, c.1910.  
Courtesy of St. Benjamin's.

Church of Christ) church usually retained the name Krider's.

The Lutherans dedicated St. Benjamin's Church on February 1, 1891. Its handsome interior was finished in hardwood, with stained glass windows presented by members and friends of the congregation. Total cost of the building, including the ground, came to \$5,400. In 1895, they purchased a 710-pound bell, which Rev. S. A. Diehl and 16 members of his congregation toted to the top of the tower for installation. Rev. Diehl's accomplishments, in addition to feats of strength, included adding more than 150 new members to St. Benjamin's during his 11-year tenure. His wife helped organize a women's service organization originally known as the "Young People's Home and Foreign Missionary Society" and became its first president in 1892.

A surge in membership gave impetus for modernizing the interior of the building during the 1920s. Rev. R. S. Patterson led the effort to remove two coal-burning stoves, install an altar and baptismal font, and enlarge the basement for a social room and kitchen. Most of the labor for excavation of the basement was donated, holding the cost of these significant improvements to \$6,000. St. Benjamin's spent another \$1,500 in 1928 for a five-acre tract in front of the church intended for additional cemetery space.

Throughout the early decades of the 20th century, talented church members provided the musical portion of St. Benjamin's services. For example,

#### AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MEN IN THE SERVICE

To our Sons in the Service:

This letter to each of you in the Service is written in behalf of the members of your Church. Once more we want to assure you that we continue steadfastly to hold you high in our thoughts and prayers. We mean to be faithful to you, remembering that you have proven your faithfulness in so many ways. Separation has deepened our interest in your welfare.

We are encouraged by the strong conviction that you have not relaxed one iota in your religious practices and habits of worship. We are confident that your religious Faith has been your dependable help under trying and difficult circumstances.

We are proud of the fact that you have answered the call of country and that you are doing your part.

Our Service Flag with its stars, reminds us each Sunday that we have interests elsewhere, yes loved ones. Our prayers seem to be more earnest, our Worship more devout, as we keep you in kindly remembrance.

We ask you to read between the lines of this letter. A prayer is written there, a prayer by faithful hearts back home, that heaven's richest blessings may be yours.

In behalf of your many friends and loved ones in your home Church.

Faithfully,

Your Pastor,

Willis R. Brenneman

From *Salem Herald*, the parish newsletter, August 1943. Courtesy of St. Benjamin's.

John L. Sweigart played either the cornet or the violin, accompanied by organist Marjorie Yingling, during the 1910s. The organ was a foot-pedaled affair until organist Ida Jane Petry Leese discovered a pipe organ being removed from a motion picture theatre in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. The dedication of the reconditioned instrument took place at St. Benjamin's on May 8, 1938. Mrs. Leese served as organist for 42 years, and her daughter, Mary Leese Kroh, was choir director for 40 years. When Mrs. Leese suffered a heart attack in the early 1960s, her granddaughter, Paula Kroh Schwartzman, took over as organist. Such long-term commitments to the church by its members were common.

During the weekly Sunday school hour, all the classes gathered together in the basement for an opening service. At special times of year such as Christmas and Easter, congregants of all ages served as actors as well as musicians and costume makers under the direction of the choir for elaborate pageants presented to full houses on Sunday evenings.

#### World War II and Thereafter

With the pastoral appointment of Rev. Willis R. Brenneman on January 1, 1942, St. Benjamin's continued to flourish. During his ministry, he welcomed 209 new members, procured Sunday school hymnals, organized a Brotherhood, and introduced weekly church bulletins and a monthly parish paper, the *Salem Herald*. During World War II, Pastor Brenneman made a special effort to reach



out to the 31 members of the congregation who were in uniform, writing them supportive letters and keeping a running address book as their deployments changed.

Under Rev. Brenneman's leadership, the congregation enlarged and renovated the 1890 church building to address the over-crowded conditions of the adult Sunday school. Limited space forced four separate classes—the young men of the "Willing Workers," the young women of the "Gleaners," and the adult Men's and Women's Bible Classes—to conduct instruction in the four corners of the sanctuary. In 1951 St. Benjamin's added a Sunday school auditorium and some additional classrooms, extended the church itself 27 feet, increasing seating capacity to 275, installed new hardwood floors, and created a sound-proof room above the narthex so that mothers and young children could see but not be heard.



One of the many German-inscribed markers in the joint cemetery.  
Courtesy of St. Benjamin's.

The congregation also created a parking lot, using land in front of the Church that had been originally purchased for expansion of the cemetery. Land for a new cemetery was set aside behind the Church. All of these changes were made possible by fundraising among members, and three bequests totaling almost \$33,000 became the seeds of an endowment.

The Young People's Home and Foreign Missionary Society, which evolved into the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, continued St. Benjamin's history of service. It held large-scale, group yard sales to benefit the needs of the church, canned fruit for the Lutheran Home in Washington, D. C., and the Deaconess Home in Baltimore County, and sent relief items abroad.

Upon Rev. Brenneman's retirement in 1963, the Rev. Albert A. Makolin became pastor. A World War II veteran, he had served with the Eighth Air Force in England. Like Rev. Diehl and his wife in the 1890s, Rev. Makolin and his wife Jewell were a selfless team serving St. Benjamin's Church. Under Rev. Makolin's leadership, membership increased and a new education building was added to the church in 1969. Jewell Makolin published *Katie and Luther Speak*, a 1985 book consisting of dialogue sermons between Martin Luther and his wife, adopted by other congregations. She also wrote "A Mind to Work," a pageant depicting episodes in St. Benjamin's history that was performed at the Church's 225th anniversary celebration in 1986.

### 2011 - 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

St. Benjamin's celebrated its 250th anniversary throughout 2011 with the theme, "Great is Thy Faithfulness." One service each month focused on a different liturgy and music, beginning with the Muhlenberg liturgy (1748) in January, when the choir sang the anthem in German. Many members attended these services attired in reproduction period costumes. Post-service receptions featured period cuisine, such as apple strudel. In March, former members and friends who had moved away were welcomed back to a Homecoming service and luncheon. *The Book of Worship with Tunes* (1880) provided both the liturgy and hymns. St. Benjamin's celebrated Memorial Day with a flag raising and a



Marker erected on site of original log Union Church in 1976 during the American bicentennial celebration. Courtesy of St. Benjamin's.

march to the 1976 marker erected by the Lutheran and Reformed congregations on the site of the original log church. The congregation honored six veterans of the Revolutionary War and five more from the War of 1812 who were buried in the cemetery, perhaps the oldest burying ground in the county.

On August 14, 2011, the Sunday closest to the church's founding date, St. Benjamin's hosted the United Church of Christ for a joint anniversary service and tea. A week later, Krider's Church reciprocated and, after the joint church service, the two congregations together held a remembrance service at the site of the original log church and the 1809 Union Church. On Reformation Sunday, October 30, 2011, St. Benjamin's welcomed Rev. Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Bishop Wolfgang D. Herz-Lane of the Delaware-Maryland Synod, who led a commemorative service. A gala banquet followed, highlighted by the display of documents and artifacts from St. Benjamin's archives.

On September 4, 2011, guest pastor Rev. David Asendorf, offered the following characterization of St. Benjamin's history:

Since 1761 people have been coming to St. Benjamin's the way you and I came here today. Men who fought in the American Revolution and the Civil War and World

War II, and the widows of men who never came back. Two and half century's worth of farmers, and laborers, and office workers, and homemakers and an occasional traveler. Old men and old women with most of their lives behind them, and young men and young women with most of their lives ahead of them. People whose memory is lovingly cherished and those who left no mark and are not remembered. Despite the enormous differences between all these men and women who have worshipped here at St. Benjamin's these 250 years, they all had one thing in common. They came here to experience God. They came in good times and in bad. They came here when life was crashing down around their heads, and nothing seemed to make any sense. They came here when the children were well, the harvest plentiful and the future bright with promise. In this community of St. Benjamin's they helped bear each other's burdens. They prayed for each other. They worked side by side. They wept together and they rejoiced together.

Many of the church members have deep roots in Carroll County. For example, twelve are direct descendants of Lorenz Formwalt, a 1770 charter member. After 250 years of service, St. Benjamin's continues to carry its many traditions into the 21st century and gives promise of many more years of Christian faithfulness and fellowship.

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#### Notes:

1. The Rev. P. H. Miller gives this date in his *History of Grace Lutheran Church*, although no extant St. Benjamin's record confirms it. On April 9, 1883, a fire that started at Jacob Thomson's livery stable swept along West Main and Carroll Streets and destroyed all the buildings within several blocks, including Grace Lutheran Church. It is likely that the early records were destroyed then. The *Baltimore Sun*, June 27, 1893, reporting the 25<sup>th</sup>





The first 250th Anniversary historic service, January 2011. Courtesy of St. Benjamin's.

anniversary of Grace Church, accepts August 12, 1761, as the founding date of St. Benjamin's.

2. St. Benjamin was a Deacon in fifth century Persia who had been imprisoned by his King. An ambassador of the Emperor of Constantinople obtained his release on condition that he would never speak to any of the courtiers about religion. St. Benjamin declared that it was his duty to preach about Christ, however, thus joining the ranks of martyrs.

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**About the Author:** Louise Young Meledin is a sixth generation member of St. Benjamin's Church, and one of the twelve direct descendants of Lorenz Formwalt (listed in the earliest membership role c.1770) who are current members of the church. Assisting her with the research for this article were: Isabel J. Frock Arbaugh, Cindy Baxter, Wilda C. Dell, Grace S. Erb, Edna Young Eyler, Marshall Jose, Judy Cashman Myers, Sandra H. Parker, John Schiller, and Paula Kroh Schwartzman .

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