



St. Paul's Lutheran Church has stood on South Broadway in Red Hook since the 1889. In these historic postcards, the red brick Lutheran Church with its characteristic rounded stained-glass window, is recognizable beneath a cover of ivy. In the early 20th century photograph (right), two women and a child linger in front of the church, along the unpaved highway. The parish, said to be the oldest in the county, has roots that go back to 1715, when the Lutherans shared a church with the German Reformed congregation at Pinck's Corners in Rhinebeck. The Red Hook church is celebrating its 275 anniversary this year.

Dutchess' oldest church turns 275

by Kathy Leonard

It was 275 years ago that a group of German refugees founded St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Today a red brick building, with a distinctive round stained-glass window facing South Broadway, is the place where the congregation worships.

The building will turn 101 years old this summer, but the church itself, the oldest in Dutchess County, is celebrating its 275th year with a birthday cake, concerts, a tree planting, guest preachers and a grand finale of fireworks.

While 1990 should bring the church's first 275 years to an end with a big bang, its birth in 1715 wasn't exactly quiet.

Passage from Palatine

The church was founded by German refugees who fled their homeland in the Rhine River valley, or Palatine (said to look similar to their new Hudson River valley home), because of persecution under the French king, Louis XIV.

Many refugees fled to England, but an emergency relief program there so drained the country's resources that the refugees were sent by Queen Anne to the colonies in America. They were to help settle the new country and work off their debts to England at the same time.

The German refugees settled in "Ryn Beck," on land granted to Judge Henry Beekman by Queen Anne. There they formed a union of Lutherans and

German Reformed worshippers at "Pinck's Corners," now the corner of Routes 9 and 9G. At that site they built a log cabin in 1715, which was also used as a school for the small community that grew up around it.

Travelers on Route 9 today may not even notice the small cemetery perched on a hill just north of Pinck's Corners, now sometimes called Wey's Corners, which marks the site of their first church.

Discord

More noticeable to the traveler is St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, known as the Old Stone Church, set atop Stone Church Hill further north on Route 9. It is surrounded by rolling farmland, an 18th century cemetery and a small white schoolhouse.

As the result of a disagreement between the German Reformed and Lutheran congregations (no one seems certain today what the disagreement was about), the German Reformed congregation bought the Lutherans' share of the church at Pinck's Corners for 25 pounds.

Shortly after, the Lutherans left the original log church to build St. Peter's.

Moving to Red Hook

It was not until 1796 that the German Reformed church made its move to Red Hook and the site of St. Paul's. At the time, Red Hook was still part of Rhinebeck Precinct.

Moving north from their Lutheran friends, the German Reformed con-

gregation purchased five acres from General John Armstrong for 30 pounds and built a frame church at the site of the present present red brick church of St. Paul's.

A violent wind storm destroyed that church in 1834, and perhaps as insurance against a similar disaster, a stone church was built in its place.

It wasn't until 100 years after their original union at Pinck's Corners that the German Reformed and Lutheran congregations worshiped together again, during a time when the German Reformed church was without a minister of their own.

Eventually the German Reformed church was dissolved completely, through a loss of members to the Dutch Reformed church farther north along the Kings Highway and to the Lutherans further south. And the church in Red Hook became Lutheran.

Fund-raising

The church that stands today on South Broadway in Red Hook was built in 1889 for \$19,207.63. The effort left the congregation with a \$6,000 debt, which they paid off in a contributions challenge.

Led by Mr. Edward Martin, who pledged to pay half of the debt if the congregation could raise the rest by the end of that year, the members of the church responded with an old-time "telethon" of sorts.

Some of the creative fund raising of the time included annual turkey dinners (held for 50 years), pew rentals

and shed rentals for the horses during services.

The "blackboard method" was also used. The sum needed was drawn off in squares and parishioners pledged for part or a whole square.

The challenge was successful, and enabled the congregation to purchase a pipe organ in 1915, half of which was paid for by a contribution from the late industrialist Andrew Carnegie in the amount of \$1,000.

The 20th century

During the Second World War the chapel, a smaller building on St. Paul's property at the corner of South Broadway and Fisk Streets, was used for meetings of the Civilian Defense Committee and the Red Cross. It was used as a war emergency room.

As a result of the fuel shortage caused by the war, the church was only heated on the weekends, until ice began to form inside and the interior paint and furnishings were in danger of deteriorating.

Today St. Paul's Lutheran Church has about 170 active members, some of whom are descendants of the original Palatines who settled nearby in 1715.

St. Paul's schedule of upcoming anniversary events includes a luncheon this Sunday, Feb. 4, to celebrate Pastor Richard B. Holzer's ten years as the church's minister (see Neighbors, page 8) and a concert by the Ne-Palz Collegium Musicum on March 25.