THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY GERMAN LUTHERAN AND REFORMED CLERGYMEN IN THE SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY*

By Charles H. Glatfelter

The main facts of the German immigration into colonial Pennsylvania are well known. The promise of religious freedom, the effect of advertising by William Penn and others, and the successful efforts of shipowners and their agents were factors which, either singly or in combination, brought thousands of dissatisfied people into the province, the vast majority of them being from southwestern Germany and from Switzerland. Although there were a few scattered Germans in Pennsylvania before 1710, that year marks the beginning of significant immigration. From then until the Revolution the annual influx was considerable, reaching its climax during the years 1749-1754. There were times during the colonial period when the German population of Pennsylvania approached one-half of the total, but after about 1765 the proportion slowly began to decline. It is probable that in 1790 one-third of the inhabitants of Pennsylvania were of German or Swiss extraction.

Some of these immigrants remained in or near Philadelphia, where they were or became artisans. Many others helped to push the expanding frontier north and west of the capital, along the line of the Blue Mountains and eventually across the Susquehanna River. There were inducements which drew settlers into western Maryland, the Shenandoah valley of Virginia, and the back country of North Carolina. Nevertheless, the hard core of German settlement in British America consisted of the colonial Pennsylvania counties of Northampton, Berks, Lancaster, and York. Even the county towns—Easton, Reading; Lancaster, and York—were predominately German in population. It should be noted that the typical Pennsylvania German was a farmer rather than a townsman.

In their religious life, the colonial Germans fell into two nor-

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mally exclusive categories: the sect people and the church people. The sect people were the heirs of the radical wing of the Protestant Reformation, which carried the principles of religious individualism and simplicity far beyond the particular limits set down by Luther, Zwingli, or Calvin. Espousal of their distinctive tenets brought persecution, for theirs were not recognized religious bodies. Emigration to Pennsylvania offered a welcome escape, and many harassed sect people availed themselves of the opportunity, particularly in the years immediately following 1710: Mennonites, German Baptists, Schwenkfelders, and others.

There is a belief still current in some minds that the sect people were the Pennsylvania Germans. Actually, very few of them arrived in the province after 1727, and by 1776 probably as many as nine out of every ten Germans in Pennsylvania were, nominally at least, church people: Lutherans, Reformed, or Roman Catholics—though there were only a few of the latter. The distinctions between the church and the sect stemmed from the fact that the church considered itself an institution into which people were born and not a voluntary association of the adult "converted." The church claimed to possess, in the preaching of the Word of God by a learned clergy and in the administration of the Sacraments, all of the necessities for achieving human redemption. Therefore, it was able to make a qualified peace with the world and attempt to include all men within the ranks.

The traditions and practices of the sect people were easily adapted to the substantial religious freedom prevailing in colonial Pennsylvania. Most of them had come to America in closely knit colonies possessing a strong corporate spirit, and they usually settled near each other. They experienced no difficulty in providing for simple meeting places or in raising up from the ranks of their laymen as many ministers as were needed.

Vastly different were the conditions among the early Lutheran and Reformed settlers. They had come to Pennsylvania either as families or in small groups, and had settled on scattered individual freeholds. They had cut themselves loose with an air of finality from the village system and from the religious institutions.

1 No mention has been made of the colonial Moravians, whose polity and missionary activities were churchly; but whose subjectiveness and rigid membership requirements remind one of the sect. They were considered sect people by the colonial Germans.

supported by taxation and always taken for granted, which they had known in Europe. Their clergymen, who had customarily taken the initiative in spiritual concerns, were not with them; and there were no established contacts with Europe to assure that they would be forthcoming at any time.

It is possible to discern three general reactions to this state of affairs on the part of the church people. First, there were those Germans who were unwilling to lend voluntary support to any form of organized religion; they exercised their privilege to join the surprisingly sizable ranks of the unchurched in Pennsylvania. Second, there were the pious, who lamented at the lack of spirituality about them and who were resolved to make substantial sacrifices in order to plant their church in the New World. Finally, there was the largest group, composed of people who had always taken their religion as a matter of course in Europe, and who were willing to do likewise in America, on one condition: that when the church should catch up with them, it be less demanding than it had been in Europe. This latter was in many ways the crucial group of church people, for the first was surely lost to the fold and the second was surely won. The third group could be won by intelligent, patient, and devoted clergymen.

German Lutheran and Reformed services in Pennsylvania were conducted as early as the first years of the eighteenth century, but the record is very thin until the appearance of several clergymen and congregations in the 1720's. By 1730 there were congregations in Philadelphia, Germantown, Falckner Swamp, Tulpehocken, Lancaster, and a few other places. The Lutheran, John Casper Stoever (1707-1779), had just begun a ministry which was to last for fifty-one years, spent mostly in the lower Susquehanna valley and east of the river. Four or five Reformed ministers were preaching—indeedly of each other, of course—the most important of them being John Philip Boehm (1683-1749) in southeastern Pennsylvania. Both Stoever and Boehm were unordained when they began their ministries.


4 Brief biographies of more than one hundred colonial Pennsylvania German Reformed clergymen, based on fifty years of research, are available in William J. Hinke, Ministers of the German Reformed Congregations in Pennsylvania and other Colonies in the Eighteenth Century (Lancaster, 1951; George W. Richards, ed.).
Fortunately, the attention of European churches was soon called to the needs of the Germans in Pennsylvania. In 1731 the Dutch Reformed church expressed its readiness to come to the aid of its brethren across the seas. Three years later the appeals of several small Lutheran congregations in and near Philadelphia met with the sympathetic response of Gotthilf August Francke, professor of theology at the University of Halle, in Saxony. More than a decade was to elapse, however, before these resolves would be translated into action. Finally, in 1742, Francke sent Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787) to be pastor of the three congregations; and four years later the Dutch Reformed sent Michael Schlatter (1716-1790), with elaborate instructions to visit and preach wherever there were Reformed people in Pennsylvania, organize congregations, and inquire as to how well they would provide for a minister if one were sent to them.

The arrival of these two capable and devoted men at a critical juncture marked a turning point in the history of their respective churches in Pennsylvania. Muhlenberg gradually extended his field of labor and influence from three congregations into almost every locality where Lutherans had settled. In 1748 he and several of his recently arrived Halle colleagues organized a ministerium, which over a period of years was able to institutionalize and preserve his own considerable influence in the fledgling church. After an almost herculean visitation of the Reformed people, Schlatter carried out his last instruction: in 1747 he organized a body, called the coetus, which was subordinate to the Dutch Reformed church and whose main function was to provide that church with some measure of control over the clergymen and funds which it had begun sending to America. Like that of the ministerium, the growth of the coetus was painfully slow, especially before about

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6 See Reports of the United German Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in North America, specially in Pennsylvania (Reading, 1882; C. W. Schaeffer, tr.), pp. 75-82.

7 William J. Mann, Life and Times of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (Philadelphia, 1888), is the best biography.

8 Henry Harbaugh, The Life of Rev. Michael Schlatter . . . (Philadelphia [1857], is the only full length biography.
1765. The loss of Schlatter, who became an independent minister in 1755, robbed the coetus of effective leadership for many years.

On the eve of the American Revolution (1776), the German Lutheran and Reformed churches were the second and third largest in Pennsylvania. Their sixty ministers and more than 265 congregations made them a noteworthy force in the spiritual life of the province. But for several reasons it was a force which fell considerably short of its reasonable potentiality. To begin with, the German churches were plagued by a continuing shortage of trained clergymen. The ratio of congregations to clergymen was higher than 4.5 to 1, more than twice that prevailing in the Presbyterian church in Pennsylvania or in the Dutch Reformed church in New York. Unlike their Presbyterian neighbors, the Germans were unable to establish training schools for a badly needed native ministry. The Reformed church did not set up its first American theological seminary until 1825, and the Lutherans followed one year later. Between the years 1742 and 1793, when the coetus severed its European ties, the Dutch Reformed church and the theological faculty of Halle together did send some fifty ministers to Pennsylvania. This was an act of Christian charity, pure and simple. Almost without exception, the outstanding colonial German clergymen were included in this number: Muhlenberg, Brunnholtz, Kurtz, Helmuth, Kunze, Schultze, Schlatter, Otterbein, Alsentz, Weyberg, Hendel, Pomp, and Helffenstein, to name a few. Nevertheless, with the passage of time this source of supply proved increasingly unsatisfactory, first in terms of quantity and later in terms of quality, too.

This shortage of trained clergymen gave rise to the irregular minister, who was often a schoolmaster or an artisan turned clergyman. Although he was untrained, unordained, and sometimes without any real spirituality, many German church people accepted him, sometimes because his price was small and again because he was the only preacher who offered himself. About one-fourth of

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9 It will probably never be possible to compare colonial churches adequately on the basis of membership. On the basis of congregations, the Presbyterians outranked either the Lutherans or the Reformed, and on the basis of numbers of clergymen it outranked both.

10 The statistics quoted in this paper have been taken from Charles H. Glatfelter, "The Colonial German Lutheran and Reformed Clergyman" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1952), Appendices I and II.
the sixty clergymen of 1776 had begun their ministries in this fashion. Thus is illustrated the degree to which Lutheran and Reformed traditions of a learned clergy had to be compromised, and at a time when there were few Presbyterian ministers in Pennsylvania who lacked a college education.\textsuperscript{11}

A second reason why the colonial German churches fell short of their reasonable potentialities is to be found in the pronounced spirit of independence characteristic of clergy and laymen alike. Only a handful of the men who began their ministries in an irregular manner were ever invited in colonial times to join the coetus or the ministerium, but there were in addition to these a number of regular clergymen who had come to America on their own initiative who never chose to join. More than a few erstwhile members resigned, for one reason or another, and continued their ministries as independents. About one-third of the sixty clergymen of 1776 fall into this category.

Many congregations deliberately refused to affiliate themselves with the coetus or ministerium. Although these bodies did make considerable gains after about 1765, as late as 1776 almost one-half of the congregations in Pennsylvania were still independent of them and of each other. On occasion, congregations were not above treating their clergymen with small consideration. They often insisted, for example, that they “hired” their ministers from year to year and could dismiss them upon the slightest provocation. This was in direct contradiction to the Lutheran and Reformed practice in Europe, and advocated by coetus and ministerium leaders for Pennsylvania, that ministerial tenure in a particular congregation was dependent upon good behavior and orthodoxy. There is ample evidence that this spirit of independence severely limited the influence which the clergy otherwise might have had on the German church people, particularly in such controversial matters as the speed of their assimilation into American cultural life and the extent of their participation in the American Revolution. There is every indication that the colonial Presbyterians, although not unaffected by this spirit, were able to utilize their resources, both clerical and lay, to much greater effect than the Germans.

This rather lengthy background provides the frame of refer-

ence in which the eighteenth century German clergymen of a limited area—the upper Susquehanna valley in this instance—can be understood. There are many similarities between their experience and that of ministers who served on the other American frontiers, both earlier and later. Because of the primitive transportation and communication facilities, there were always tremendous difficulties in arranging for regular worship services. The German church people chose to solve the problem of distance by establishing many congregations, most of which were necessarily small and financially weak. It follows that ministerial salaries were low, whether expressed in money or in kind; and they were often irregularly paid. Country clergymen learned that this particular solution imposed heavily upon them; many served six, or even as many as a dozen, congregations at one time. More than a few supplemented their incomes by engaging in farming. Wherever they went, the German church people were likely to make use of the distinctive arrangement which they devised in response to the problems of distance, scarcity of money, and shortage of clergymen: the union church—one building built and maintained by separate and distinct Lutheran and Reformed congregations. This arrangement was peculiar to no one region in Pennsylvania; about one-half of the congregations were using it in 1776.

Settlements were made in the lower Susquehanna valley in the opening years of the eighteenth century. The appearance of the Germans in this region can be charted by the founding of congregations before 1740 at such places as Tulpehocken, Lancaster, New Holland, Muddy Creek, Swatara, Quitopahilla, York, and Hanover. As population increased and fanned out, filials of these mother congregations appeared. By 1748 there were more than one hundred Lutheran and Reformed congregations in Pennsylvania, scattered from northwestern Northampton to northeastern Adams counties. At this time the northern frontier, as far as the Susquehanna valley was concerned, lay in the present counties of Lebanon, Lancaster, and York.

In the following years, with the Scots-Irish in the vanguard, settlements were made in the upper valley. The French and Indian War had the obvious effect of retarding the normal development of this area. A map showing Lutheran and Reformed congregations in 1765 will reveal that, while the total number in Pennsyl-
Pennsylvania had almost doubled since 1748, there were as yet only a few youthful congregations in Schuylkill, southern Dauphin, and Cumberland counties.

In the decade before the American Revolution, two general directions for immediate German expansion became evident: westward into Westmoreland and neighboring counties and northward along the Susquehanna River. By 1776 there was a cluster of more than a dozen congregations, both Lutheran and Reformed, in the neighborhood of Shamokin (now Sunbury), as the area near the forks of the river was called. The Revolution practically halted the founding of new churches everywhere, but soon thereafter it was resumed in earnest. In 1793 more than forty congregations stood in the same general region where there had been only a dozen seventeen years before. This growth continued for many years.

Because of the lack or inaccessibility of pertinent records, it is impossible to determine the exact time of founding of many of these early congregations. There is also the major problem of deciding just what the term "founding of a congregation" ought to mean. However, it appears certain that by 1776 there were organizations in northern Dauphin county at Killinger's church, near Millersburg; at St. John's Lutheran church, Berrysburg; and at Hoffman's Reformed church, near Lykens; in Northumberland county at Himmel church, near Rebuck; at Zion's (Stone Valley), near Herndon; and at Sunbury; in Snyder county at Mohr's Lutheran church, near Freeburg; at Rowe's Lutheran church, near Salem; at Bauerman's church, near Pallas; and finally in Perry county, at St. Michael's Lutheran church, near Liverpool.

There may have been other congregations which had been organized by this time; the evidence is inconclusive. It is interesting to note that, as is also the case in western Pennsylvania, many of the old Reformed congregations, always considerably weaker than the Lutheran, have long since disappeared.

Some possible criteria are the dates of (1) the first sermon, (2) the first administration of the Sacraments, (3) organization: choosing of lay officers, and (4) erection of the first building.

This subject has been explored in Charles Fisher Snyder, "The Beginnings of The Reformed Church in Northumberland and nearby Counties," in the Northumberland County Historical Society Proceedings and Addresses, XV (1946), 37-122, and in George Franklin Dunkelberger, The Story of Snyder County... (Selinsgrove [1948]), pp. 610-620.
There were parochial schools attached to as many of these early churches as could afford them, as was the custom of the Germans wherever they settled in Pennsylvania. One of the normal duties of the schoolmaster was to read sermons on Sundays in the absence of the regular minister, which in many congregations was more often than not.

The movement of the German church people into the upper Susquehanna valley resembled every other of their previous expansions in Pennsylvania in that the people had again preceded their clergy. A glance at the minutes of either coetus or ministerium during these years will reveal why their churches were slow in catching up with them: there were as yet many large vacant congregations in the older sections of the province. In the absence of any authority to direct otherwise, these would most certainly attract the first available clergymen; and the less desirable parishes of the Susquehanna valley would have to wait their turn.

Probably the first regular minister to preach in the upper valley was the Reverend Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg (1750-1801), son of the Lutheran patriarch, who was then serving congregations in Lebanon county. In March, 1771, he promised a man who had come "from beyond the Blue Mountains" that he would visit there at his earliest convenience. He made two trips—in June and November, 1771—and on both occasions preached to many receptive people, both Lutheran and Reformed. He organized no congregations, and apparently did not return again. In 1773 he accepted a call to New York City.14 A neighbor, the Reverend John William Hendel (1740-1798), pastor of the Tulpehocken Reformed charge, was the first Reformed clergyman to minister in the Shamokin region. He did organize several congregations in upper Dauphin and Northumberland counties, but never became a resident minister.15

The spiritual needs of the inhabitants of the valley soon reached the level of the coetus and the ministerium. In 1776 several Reformed congregations "at Shamokin" asked to be visited by ministers, and their request was granted.16 Three years earlier the

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15 William J. Hinke, Reformed Ministers, pp. 113-114.
members of the ministerium had discussed the possibility of trying to locate a temporarily unoccupied clergyman in the “district called Schamokin, whither a very large number of families are moving to settle.” 17 Little or nothing resulted from these deliberations, because neither the coetus nor the ministerium had as yet fully met the challenge of the ever-lengthening frontier, as it particularly applied to them. The Presbyterians were trying to preserve outlying congregations by having ministers visit them with some regularity at the direction of presbytery or synod, and the Methodists were already offering the very effective itinerant system. It is true that Lutheran and Reformed leaders had long endeavored to preach wherever they were called—and that is indeed the substance of the illustrations cited above—but it was only after many years had passed that they were able to see the needs of their field in terms of a more concerted effort than a series of isolated preaching journeys. When the ministerium provided in 1805 for a system of traveling preachers to visit and organize congregations on the frontier, three of the seven men designated for the first year were assigned to the Susquehanna valley. 18

Nothing resulted from the discussion by the ministerium in 1773; but in the same year John Michael Enterline (1726-1800) took up land in the Lykens valley, Dauphin county, thus becoming the first resident Lutheran clergyman in the upper Susquehanna valley. A protégé of sorts of the elder Muhlenberg, Enterline had been a parochial schoolmaster before he was pressed into ministerial service at the age of forty. It is possible that Muhlenberg suggested this northward move to Enterline, who was living in Hummelstown, Dauphin county, in 1773. In any event, he organized and served congregations in Dauphin, Northumberland, Snyder, and Perry counties until his death in 1800. It is probable that he was never an ordained minister. 19

Samuel Dubendorf (1721-1798/9) was the first resident Re-

19 Most of the brief accounts of Enterline contain inaccuracies. The barest outline of his career before going into the Susquehanna valley is given in Muhlenberg Journals, I, 490; II, 167, 199, 247, 510. See also Documentary History, pp. 265-266.
formed minister in the Shamokin area, where his career in many respects resembled that of Enterline. He was past middle age when he began his ministry there in 1779, having left his congregation in Germantown ostensibly because he was suspected of being a Tory. Actually, he had been sent to America just as the Revolution was getting under way, and was unfortunate enough to arrive with a boatload of Hessian troops and then be detained temporarily by the British in New York. The field of his ministry was smaller than Enterline’s, and he left it to serve briefly as pastor in Carlisle. Dubendorf died in Upper Paxton township, Dauphin county, in December, 1798, or January, 1799.20

There is much of the mediocre and something of the pathetic about these two rather obscure men. Although both were members of their respective church bodies when they moved into northern Dauphin county, they were soon reduced to the status of practical independents by the infirmities of age, distance, and possibly by other factors. Enterline is not on record as having attended any meetings of the ministerium after 1782. On several occasions his congregations voiced their dissatisfaction with his services; there is the distinct impression that he was not an inspiring pastor.21 Both men were poor; the inventory of the personal property of Dubendorf, exhibited in Harrisburg in 1799, amounted to only £10/18/6 and consisted of little more than a handful of books and some clothing. However, each owned land, and it is reasonable to assume that when his congregations were unable to give the promised support, he did not go hungry. All in all, Enterline and Dubendorf had an unenviable task set before them in their declining years: to preach like John the Baptist in the wilderness, as a contemporary put it; to flee from the Indians during the Revolutionary war; and regularly to cover the many miles between their preaching points. They have left a deep imprint on the religious history of the upper Susquehanna valley.

The postwar increase in population created opportunities for more than two German clergymen in this area, but neither coetus nor ministerium was in any better position than before to provide them. The entire field which they had attempted to supply in co-

20William J. Hinke, Reformed Ministers, pp. 198-200, should be supplemented with information available in the Samuel Dubendorf estate papers, Office of the Register of Wills, Dauphin County, Harrisburg.

21Documentary History, pp. 182-183, 194.
Colonial times was bursting at the seams, and now Shamokin had to share priority with western Pennsylvania, western Maryland, and Virginia; just as the first generation of American clergymen was dying off and the European supply of recruits had about stopped.

A number of independent ministers, both Lutheran and Reformed, began filtering into Northumberland and Snyder counties from other areas, and remained for brief periods in the eighties and nineties: Cyriacus Spangenberg (d. 1795); Herman Jacob Schellhard; Frederick William Jasinsky (d. 1815); Carl Christian Goetz; and probably others. With the exception of Spangenberg, there is no reason to doubt the complete sincerity of these men, but their ministrations were not considered adequate. The basic desire of the Shamokin people to order their religious affairs in a regular way is demonstrated by their continuing appeals to the coetus (which became an independent Reformed synod in 1793) and to the ministerium. At first, the best they could hope for was that some young ministerial candidate—usually one whom they themselves had secured—would receive licensure and ordination; and then, that he would not soon leave them for some other charge. Christian Espich, John Herbst, Jonathan Rahausen (1764-1817), George Geistweit (1761-1831), and others are examples; in each instance, their connection with the upper Susquehanna valley lasted less than a decade. Rahausen, for example, was secured in 1789 by four or five congregations who appealed to the coetus to ordain him. Within a year after their request was granted, he left them—in the prime of his life—to take up an equally arduous task in Frederick and Washington counties, Maryland.22

A proper conclusion to this paper lies beyond its scope in point of time. In 1800 the number of congregations was still on the increase, and the day when there would be an adequate number of clergymen was in the distant future. Within a few years such names as Walter, Fries, and Fisher appeared; and with them there came a second generation of resident ministers, to devote their lives to the glory of God and the service of the German fathers of the upper Susquehanna valley.

22 William J. Hinke, Reformed Ministers, pp. 236-238.