

"Baron" Stiegel and the Muhlenbergs

By M. LUTHER HEISEY

In February, 1762, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg visited Heidelberg, Tulpehocken, Lebanon (in dreadfully cold weather), Ephrata and Canestoge; all points within the early bounds of Lancaster County. He was engaged in visiting and consoling the sick, preaching and baptizing. Saturday, February 27, he journeyed to "Mr. [Henry William] Stiegel's iron works. Preached there on Psalm 22: 26, 27, and spent the night."¹ On Sunday, he rode seven miles with Mr. Stiegel to Ephrata, and then three miles more to the "Canestoge" church, where he also preached. This Conestoga refers to the Bergstrasse Lutheran Church of Ephrata Township, for it is the only one that could be found about three miles from Ephrata. The Rev. John Samuel Schwertfeger was a clerical delegate to the Ministerium in 1762 from Conestoga, representing New Holland, Bergstrasse, etc. Among those who gathered at Philadelphia for the meetings of the Ministerium, besides Pastor Schwertfeger, were Pastor Gerock and Adam Simon Kuhn of Lancaster, and Henry William Stiegel and his wife of Elizabeth Furnace, near Brickerville. All were greeted cordially by Pastor Muhlenberg.

At the gathering in Philadelphia on Tuesday evening, June 29, 1762, at 7 o'clock, Squire Kuhn and Mr. Stiegel, of Lancaster County, arranged an artistic and pleasant program of church music.² Stiegel was an accomplished musician, having had a pipe organ in his mansion at Manheim, and was capable of leading his workmen in a service of praise and devotion. At the dedication of Trinity Church in Lancaster in 1766, the music was "specially arranged and prepared for the occasion, at the request of the church council, by Mr. Stiegel."³ The musical selections had been printed for distribution, so that all could follow the choir during the sessions of both days.

It was at the home of Mr. Stiegel on Christmas, 1770, that "the master of the furnace [Stiegel] had provided for excellent church music."⁴ Also, one hundred and twenty communicants partook of the Lord's Supper. Again, during Passion Week, March 25-28, 1771, services were held every evening at the residence of Mr. Stiegel. The Rev. Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg was the pastor in charge of the meetings.

Stiegel, who had been holding services for his workmen and others in a chapel on the second floor of his mansion in Manheim, decided that the time had come for organizing a Lutheran congregation. Being well acquainted

¹ Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, Tappert and Doberstein, Phila., 1942, p. 492.

² Ibid., p. 532.

³ Memorial Volume, Trinity Lutheran Church, Lancaster, 1861, p. 44.

⁴ Diary of the Rev. F. A. C. Muhlenberg, from the Lutheran Church Review, 1905-1906. Original copy in the archives of Trinity Lutheran Church, Reading, Pa. Item furnished by George L. Heiges.

with the Muhlenbergs, he was instrumental in securing the services of Frederick Augustus Conrad, son of the patriarch, as first pastor. Stiegel, quite naturally, was selected as one of the first trustees. He deeded a piece of ground on East High Street, near his home, to the congregation on December 4, 1772. Here they built their first house of worship in the style of the times —of logs, with a brick floor and a gallery extending on three sides. Stiegel required a nominal payment of five shillings, and further, what has become known to thousands through the famous "Festival of the Red Rose," the payment as stipulated in the deed "in the month of June yearly for ever hereafter the Rent of One Red Rose if the same shall be lawfully demanded."

Did Stiegel lawfully demand this payment in the next year? If so, then to a Muhlenberg (Frederick A. C.) goes the honor of making the first payment of the red rose, for he was pastor there until December, 1773.

The last time the names of Stiegel and Muhlenberg appear together is found in an entry in the church book of Zion Lutheran Church signed by the pastor. On the Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity, 1773, Stiegel presented twenty lottery or chance tickets for the benefit of the church. Lotteries, then, were not in disrepute.

The above are but a few of the facts which reveal Stiegel as a true Christian, a devout churchman, and an upright citizen. The modern novelist who would defame or vilify such a character and would picture him a common philanderer, to make a book salable, deserves the condemnation of such organizations as the Lancaster County Historical Society, and more, deserves a reproof, even a legal one, from the descendants of such a good man.