

DAVID TANNEBERGER, ORGAN BUILDER

By Paul E. Beck

(Most of what we know about David Tanneberger is taken from the church records of the Lititz Moravian congregation. The information is meager at best. The following paper has been prepared from valuable notes on the subject made by Mr. Abraham R. Beck and from my own familiar acquaintance with a few of the Tanneberger organs which still are in existence.—P. E. B.)

DAVID TANNEBERGER, originally Tannenber, was born in Berthlesdorf, Upper Lusatia, March 21, 1728. He was the son of Johann Tannenber who, with his wife Judith (m. n. Nitschmann) had left Moravia in 1727.

David Tanneberger came to Bethlehem in 1749 and soon after his arrival there married Anna Rosina Kern. They had five children: three daughters and two sons. Their first daughter, Rosina, was born in 1750. She married William Cassler. Maria Elizabeth, b. 1753, married John Philip Bachmann, the organ builder who learned his trade with and later succeeded Tanneberger. Anna Maria, b. 1756, married Bro. Schropp, warden in Bethlehem. Of his two sons, David died in 1792. Samuel, b. 1766, died in 1788.

Tanneberger's wife died in 1792 and in 1800 he married Anna Maria Lang.

In 1758, being then thirty years of age, David Tanneberger assisted "Father" Klemm in building a small pipe organ for the Nazareth Hall chapel and there, probably, he first became interested in his subsequent profession.

Tanneberger removed to Lititz on August 16, 1756. He purchased the John George Klein house. This old stone building stood on a site opposite the present Wollé store property. It was known as the "Pilger Haus" and for a few years previous to the coming of David Tanneberger, had been used as a tavern and store by Bro. Andrew Horn. Horn had now moved to the new tavern, "Zum Anker."

(Klein, it will be remembered, was the founder of Lititz, having given his entire farm, an extensive tract, to the Moravians.)

Tanneberger conducted his business in the John George Klein house until his death in 1804. While engaged in the final tuning of the new organ he had built for the Lutheran Church at York, he was stricken with apoplexy and, falling from a bench upon his head, he received injuries from which he died a few days later, May 19, 1804.

(Apoplexy is thought to have been the cause of his death because the church record states that his wife said he had had such an attack a year previously, in 1803.)

At his funeral services, held by Bro. John Martin Beck in the Lutheran church, at York, his last organ was played for the first time. The children of the Moravian and Lutheran congregations of York sang beside his grave. He was buried in the York Moravian graveyard.

Tanneberger was a beloved and prominent man in the church community. As a good violinist and a notably fine tenor singer, he was of valued assistance in the church music.

David Tanneberger was far more than a mere organ builder. He was an artist. In thought, a poet. The chaste ornamentation on the cases of his remaining organs proclaims his lofty poetic genius.

The interior mechanism of his instruments reveals the astonishing skill of the master builder. For example, each register or stop controlled a rank

of fifty-six pipes. In a twelve stop organ, that meant the making by hand of six hundred ninety-six individual pipes. Of these, from one-third to one-fourth were of pewter; the rest of resonant, well seasoned wood.

In every line and joint of their perfection, the smaller wooden pipes show the affectionate touch of the skilled master while the age-browned ranks of their taller companions seem to stand in modest challenge of modern methods of construction.

If one wished to display the superb craftsmanship of this artist-mechanic by exhibiting a single specimen of his work among the attractions of some brilliant world's fair, any wooden pipe, taken at random and without comparative selection from any one of Tanneberger's organs would serve the purpose quite as well as any other,—so apparent is the loving care with which each individual "voice" was brought into existence.

Truly this man "buildd better than he knew" for his organs have far outlived more pretentious instruments which themselves were installed many years after the erection of the stout old "Tannebergers." (Witness the splendid Jardine organ which was used in Bethlehem from 1873 to 1910 and the excellent Hook and Hastings organ which served the Lititz Church from 1879 to 1912.)

It is impossible to set down a complete and accurate list of the organs made by David Tanneberger in Lititz because his account books have never been found. The following list of the organs is taken mostly from the Lititz archives. However, as Tanneberger's business activity extended over a period of nearly fifty years, there must have been many more organs than are here noted.

Year
1761 Lititz. For the Sisters' House. Cost 50 pounds (\$133.50).

1761 Lititz. For the Congregation Chapel. 40 pounds (\$106.80).

These instruments were of Tanneberger's smaller type. They stood about sixteen feet high and were about three feet in depth (thickness).

1767 Albany, New York. Size and price not mentioned.

The church diarist writes that when this organ was finished and set up in Tanneberger's workshop "a great many strangers from Lancaster and Philadelphia, mostly from the latter city, and even some Quakers, came to hear it and to see it."

1768 Maxatawny, Berks County, Lutheran church.

The size and price not mentioned.

This organ served the joint Lutheran and Reformed congregations continuously until about the year 1910.

Concerning the Maxatawny Organ the archives have this following record: Nov. 17, 1768. Many lovers of music came from Lancaster—a Lutheran and a Reformed minister among them—to hear David Tanneberger's newly completed organ."

1769 Goshenhoppen (now East Greenville, Berks Co.)

Size and price not mentioned in record.

This organ was considered a wonder in its day. After one hundred and ten years of service, this fine old instrument was dismantled and many of its parts were built into a later organ which was used up to October, 1917. Therefore, in this case, the master's handiwork successfully withstood one hundred forty-eight years of use. The organ was replaced by a modern instrument in October 1917.

1770 Lancaster, Reformed Church. No specification recorded.

Referring to this the Pennsylvania Gazette (Phila.) Jan. 10, 1771, has the following entry: "Lancaster, Pa., Dec. 24, 1770. Yesterday we had the pleasure of hearing for the first time the new organ of the High Dutch Reformed Church, of this place, accompanied with a variety of vocal music composed for the occasion, which I may venture to say, not only proved by my own experience, but the approbation of all present was never equaled in any place of worship in the province or perhaps on the continent. The organ was made by David Tanneberger of Lititz—a Moravian town nearby—and I dare venture to assert, is much superior in workmanship and sweetness of sound to any made by the late celebrated Mr. Feyerling, who was so generally taken notice of for his ingenuity. It does great honor to the maker and is worth the attention and notice of the curious who may happen to pass this way. It will doubtless recommend him to all who are desirous of having work of that nature."

1770 Reading, Trinity Lutheran Church.

Cost £230; \$614.10. Judging from the price, this must have been a ten-stop organ.

1774 Lancaster, Trinity Lutheran Church. No details.

Many of the pipes and the fore part of the case of this organ were used on the cassavant Freres instrument, set up in 1923.

1775 St. Mary's Catholic Church (Lancaster). No details.

1775 Lebanon, Moravian Church. Price not given.

This was shortly before the Revolution. The church stood near the site of the present city and was called Hebron.

The following is from the "Moravian" of May 25, 1898. It is by Rev. Dr. H. A. Gerdson:

"David Tanneberger built an organ for Hebron (Lebanon) some short time before the Revolution. It became quite celebrated as the first organ in what is now known as the Lebanon Valley. Bro. Bader played this organ with such skill that the fame of organ and master spread far and wide. Whenever army officers came within reasonable distance of Lebanon, they always made a detour to the Hebron church to see and hear the organ. The instrument was later moved to the Lebanon Moravian church and was destroyed by fire when the church was burned in 1858."

This organ was in continuous use for a period of ninety-three years.

1775 Frederick Town, Md., Reformed Church. Cost, \$193.37.

1776 Easton. No specifications nor denomination of church reported.

1777 Lititz. For the Single Brethren's House. Cost £50. One of the smaller type organs and similar to the one in use in the Sister's House.

1783 Hagerstown, Maryland. No details recorded.

1786 Egypt, Lehigh County. For the Lutheran Church (probably a rural congregation). No details recorded.

This famous organ produced so profound an impression on the inhabitants of the region that the church was known for many years as "The Organ Church."

1787 Lititz Moravian Church. Cost £200; \$533.33 1-3.

This organ and the one built for Nazareth were of similar size and architecture. The action was of the tracker, fan-frame and roller-board type. The console was detached from the body of the organ and reversed, so that the organist sat facing the pulpit. The

woodwork of both case and console was painted a glossy white. The front-pipes were brightly gilded.

(So far as we know, Tanneberger never varied this dignified and beautiful color scheme except in some of the smaller organs where the front-pipes were allowed to remain in polished pewter. In combination with the brilliant white of the woodwork, this secondary scheme also produced a fine effect. His colorings and the admirable taste he displayed in the architecture and ornamentation of his organ cases brought about, in themselves, a quiet charm well suited to the spirit of worship.)

The building of the present Lititz Church was begun in 1786. In the minutes of the Aufsehr Collegium (Overseers' or Elders' Conference) for February 22, of that year, there stands the following entry: "Bro. Tanneberger offered to build an organ for our new church with twelve stops, two manuals and pedal for 350 pounds (\$933.34)."

On March 22, one month later, appears the following: "It was thought best to submit our proposed plan for the organ to the Helpers' Conference in Bethlehem to get its resolution on the subject." (The Helpers' Conference corresponded to our P. E. C.) On May 22, two months later, the minutes report the very terse answer from Bethlehem thus: "The price of the organ must be fixed at £200" (\$533.34).

This sweeping cut must have come as an unpleasant surprise to the Lititz people. It must have been a sharp disappointment to Tanneberger whose pride in his work had prompted him to plan an especially fine instrument for his home church.

Owing to this arbitrary reduction in the proposed price, the Lititz organ was built as a one-manual instrument. It served the congregation from 1787 to 1879, ninety-two years. It was then removed to the Moravian Church in South Bethlehem where it continued in service until 1910. In that year it was superseded by a new organ.

The honored old organ, center and support of the numberless bright musical events of one hundred and eighteen years, was then dismantled and returned to Lititz, its birthplace. Its parts separated, it was quietly stored away and has never again been set up.

1790 Philadelphia. For Zion Lutheran Church, Fourth and Cherry Sts.

Details are not given in the record but the instrument must have been a large and fine one as we may judge from the following letter written by Tanneberger to a friend in Lititz. (At this time, Tanneberger was sixty-two years old. So far as is known, this is the only word we have that was written by him personally. Something of the sweetness of his character may be seen in what he writes.)

"That myself and assistants are well, I take with thanks from the Lord's hand, and through His blessings, we have got so far with our work. On the main manual, seven stops are now in place and the pedal is complete with the exception of five pipes in the Trombone Bass. The Echo is in place and completed. On the upper manual, one stop, the Principal, is finished. When all are drawn out on the lower manual, with pedal, the church is well filled with the volume of sound, and to everyone's astonishment.

I am glad that you will accompany Bro. Herbst to the Dedication; Come, by all means. Not that you will see anything extraordinary, but that you can share my thankfulness that the Lord has helped me. H. Helmuth is busily engaged on the 'Fest Psalm' for the Dedication. As regards the music for the same one can plainly

see that it will be very simple and not at all after our taste." (Gar nicht nach unserm Schmach.)

General Washington and Congress honored the dedication of this organ with their presence in the church.

Four years later, most unfortunately, this church and its splendid new organ were destroyed by fire. (1794)

Philadelphia (date unknown) German Reformed Church, Race street below 4th. 1790 Spring City. Zion's Lutheran Church (rural).

This organ was in constant service for 122 years. It was replaced by a new instrument in 1912. The old organ was not dismantled. It still stands in the church and is used once each year at a special service held in its honor!

1793 Graceham, Maryland, Moravian Church.

One of the "smaller type." Stands sixteen feet high by three feet in depth. The manual comprises four and one-half octaves; from low C to high F. There are four stops. No names appear on the stop-faces. These ancient titles have disappeared through more than a century of handling. The colors of the keys are reversed, that is, the "naturals" are black while the "sharps" and "flats" are white. This was the order in many of Tanneberger's organs, particularly in the smaller ones and in the earlier instruments.

The diary of the Graceham Church records the following note: "Bro. Tanneberger came from Lititz on April 25, 1793, and set up the new organ. In a lovefeast on Saturday, May 4, 1793, the organ was used for the first time."

The architectural design of the front of this organ is beautiful. The carvings are chaste and never overdone.

With its glistening new white paint and its polished pewter front-pipes shining like burnished silver, this organ must have been an object of great beauty when it passed on its journey by four-horse wagon from Lititz to Graceham in 1793.

The state historical museum at Harrisburg seeks to collect only such articles as show the upward development—social, agricultural and commercial—of Pennsylvania's own inhabitants. While resident in Harrisburg, it occurred to the writer that the life work of a man so outstanding in artistic achievement and in the cultural uplift of his fellowmen as David Tanneberger should be honored by recognition on the part of the Commonwealth.

Dr. Thomas L. Montgomery, the state librarian, and Mr. Boyd Rothrock, curator of the state museum, heartily accepted the suggestion. The nearest worthy example of the great builder's art remained in Graceham, just over the Maryland line and comparatively handy to Harrisburg. Space in the overcrowded museum was at a premium and the state appropriation for matters of this kind was practically exhausted but the proposition to gain the old organ for the state collection was favorably acted upon by the authorities. This was in 1920.

Presupposing that the 127-year-old organ was now worn out and set aside, Dr. Montgomery delegated the writer to ask the trustees of the church to present the relic to our state. The organ was to have been brought to Harrisburg by auto truck.

The writer willingly made the trip to Graceham and saw the trustees of the congregation. But his surprise was unbounded when the board replied that the State of Pennsylvania was welcome to the organ when the church was through with it but that, for the present, the instrument should continue to be used in the weekly services as usual. And that after one hundred twenty-seven years of use!

1793 Nazareth Moravian Church

One manual; pedal; ten stops. Cost £274. (\$731.58)

This organ was the twin sister of the one built for Lititz. The fact that the Lititz organ cost but \$533.34 while that for Nazareth cost \$731.58 must have been due to the fluctuation of the currency in the post-Revolutionary days.

The chapel in Nazareth Hall was dedicated in 1756. Two years later, in 1758, the first organ was put in place there. It was built by "Father" Klemm, assisted by David Tanneberger who was then thirty years of age. This primitive instrument was in use for thirty-five years, until 1793.

By that year, Tanneberger had become a flourishing and successful organ builder. His factory was at Lititz. On being commissioned to do so, he now (1793) built what we know as "the Nazareth organ."

1795 to 1798—

Between these years, their exact dates lost, Tanneberger built the following organs:

Baltimore, Md., Lutheran Church. Price £375.

Macungie, Berks County, Lutheran and Reformed Church (rural).

Cost £400; \$1068.00. Judging from the price, this must have been one of Tanneberger's largest organs.

Tohickon, Bucks County. Cost £200.

White Plain Township, Montgomery Co., (rural). Cost £200.

1798 Salem, North Carolina, Moravian Church.

This was one of Tanneberger's very finest instruments. The price as recorded in Salem was \$1948.05. This includes transportation by wagons (a long distance and an arduous task), and entertainment of John Philip Bachman, Tanneberger's son-in-law, who came to Salem to set up the instrument and was obliged to remain for nearly a year. The price also includes the wages of one Van Zevely, a carpenter of Salem, who assisted Bachman and who worked with him during all of that time.

The console of the organ was detached and reversed. The organist faced the minister at the opposite end of the church. The keys in this and the later organs were as we find them today: white "naturals" and black "sharps."

Following is a list of the stops of this organ:

Great Organ:

- 1 Open Diapason
- 2 Flauto
- 3 Stopped Diapason
- 4 Gamba
- 5 Principal
- 6 Fifteenth
- 7 Twelfth
- 8 Viola (added a few years later)

Swell Organ:

- 1 Salicet
- 2 Open Diapason
- 3 Flauto Douce
- 4 Flauto Amabili
- 5 Piccolo
- 6 Viol Di Gamba

- Pedal:
1 Violoncello
2 Bourdon

- Couplers:
1 Great to Pedal
2 Swell to Pedal
3 Swell to Great
• Manuals, 54 keys each.
• Pedals, 25 keys.

A considerable part of the cost of the organ was due to the enormous bellows which had to be built into the attic of the church. They were so bulky and so solidly built that they remain in place to the present day, long after the disappearance of the organ itself. For a description of these bellows, see latter part of this paper.

The Salem organ, for one hundred and twelve years in active service and which had been a source of wonder and admiration to thousands, was dismantled in 1910. Its parts were stored in the attic of one of the buildings of Salem Academy. The organ was replaced by a new and larger instrument, also of two-manuals, made by the Kimball Organ Co.

1798 Salem, N. C. (Probably for one of the chapels). Cost £150.

1799 Lancaster Moravian Church. Cost £260.

1801 Madison, Virginia.

Of the "smaller type." Four and one-half octaves; eight stops. Was somewhat larger than the Graceham organ. One John Yager came from Madison to purchase it. It was hauled to its destination on four-horse wagon by Jacob Rouse. The instrument was set up in the church by Tanneberger's assistant, John Philip Bachman.

1801 New Holland, Lancaster County, Reformed Church.

This was a 10-stop organ. It cost £200. In this organ the writer found an interesting attempt at producing a "swell" for mechanically increasing the volume of tone while the instrument was being played upon. The device worked smoothly but it had a distinctly crude effect upon the music. It consisted of a small lever which, at a touch of the player's foot, threw into action the Open Diapason stop. Another touch reversed the mechanism and withdrew the stop.

The writer went to New Holland during the present summer (1925) for the purpose of re-visiting his old Tanneberger friend. Entering the well remembered auditorium, he was amazed to find the organ loft occupied by a new instrument. The old organ had lately been replaced and had been given to a smaller congregation elsewhere. So the gallant old instrument still flourishes after continuous service of one hundred and twenty-four years!

1804 York, Pa. Christ Lutheran Church.

The cost was 355 pounds; \$947.85. No other details are recorded. Upon the estimate of the price, it must have been a large instrument.

It was while tuning this organ that David Tanneberger, then seventy-six years of age, fell from a bench and sustained injuries from which he died.

Within recent years this organ was removed to the large chapel adjoining the church. Only certain minor parts were renewed. So much of the original organ remains that it now stands (with its properly adjusted wind pressure and its renewed action mechanism) as the best specimen we have of Tanneberger's master workmanship. (1925)

1805 Hanover, Pa. German Reformed Church, built by Tanneberger's successor, John Philip Bachman.

In the construction of his organ-bellows, Tanneberger followed two patterns. The wind plant of the larger instrument was arranged as follows: Three large, rectangular bellows each measuring approximately three and one-half feet by nine, were so placed that one rested above two. The lower ones acted as feeders for the upper. The latter became a reservoir, thus insuring a steady and even flow of wind to the wind-chests. The topmost bellows was heavily weighted with stone to give the necessary pressure. The feeders were worked by ropes which descended through the ceiling of the church. The wind supply was delivered to the organ through a wooden flue called the wind trunk. In a few instances (notably in the Salem organ) iron rods were employed for the operation of the bellows instead of ropes. The ropes were usually pulled by hand. The rods had powerful treadles at their extremities which were operated by the foot of the bellows blower or "puller." Working these bellows was no easy matter. The blower placed his foot on one of the treadles, braced himself by the hand railing which was placed there for that purpose and then, by using both his weight and his strength, brought down the lever while the opposite one was rising. Stepping now to the higher one and again bracing himself, he repeated the operation and thus supplied the needed current.

These bellows were enormously heavy and cumbersome. The very building of the ponderous framework which supported them was a lengthy task. In the churches at Lititz and at Salem, in the silence of the attic, sets of these monster bellows are still standing. And there they will remain. They have been in position for more than a century. Their removal would be a matter of excessive labor.

The stout old bellows in Lititz is an admirably constructed device. It still is capable of delivering a copious blast of air. (

Tanneberger's other form of bellows, used in the New Holland organ and some others, was as follows: Two large, box-shaped plungers which were suspended from either end of a stout walking beam, fitted snugly into two other great boxes so built as exactly to receive them. They too were placed in the church attic just above the organ. Operated by ropes from below, one box was always descending as the other went up. They sent their blasts directly to the wind chests. They were not so difficult of operation as the first type but neither were they so effective. The plungers fed into a reservoir bellows just as the feeders did in the larger blower described above.

The "smaller type" organs, Graceham, Easton, the Sisters' House chapel, etc., contained small bellows which were built into the base of the organ case and were operated by the player's foot.

Two incidents, mentioned in the church diary, are strongly indicative of Tanneberger's character. While he was respected and loved by his townsmen, there is evidence in the records that he occasionally troubled the clergy with his disregard of their stern, repressive rules. He and his family sometimes took little liberties; and no wonder, considering how much more he came in contact with the outer world than did his fellow church members. For instance, the single sisters were positively forbidden to attend funerals in the country. (1781. p. 362 Elders' Conf.) Tanneberger's daughter lived in the Sisters' House. Upon the death of the wife of their neighbor, John Huber, Tanneberger took Rosina to the funeral. It was held in the country. For this he received a sharp reprimand from the authorities. As for Rosina, there was something more severe in waiting for her. She underwent actual punishment in the Sisters' House.

Another incident: Tanneberger, his son-in-law, William Cassler, and John George Geitner were accustomed to meet every Sunday afternoon at Tanne-

berger's house for social chat, probably over pipes and old canary. There was much to talk about. The Revolution had worked vast changes on the political aspect of the country. President Washington, Congress and the restless activities of the colonies, now newly become states; together with the economic welfare of the church settlement, doubtless all were discussed by the little junto. This weekly meeting worried the Aufsehr Collegium considerably. It is amusing to notice that they innocently set down in the record such remarks as: "What does this mean?" "What can they have to talk about?"

The incredible labyrinth of constructive detail in the interior of the organs, where every square inch of woodwork and of hardware had to be produced by hand, shows Tanneberger to have been a man of prodigious and unceasing diligence. And one is astonished to learn that besides his splendid succession of organs, he also made pianos! We know of at least two of them. The record states that he made one for Bro. Lembke and one for the "Kinder Haus," the primitive school which is now Linden Hall. The school piano cost £22, 10s; (\$60.00).

As an architect, Tanneberger had a marked gift. All of his organ cases reveal this. He designed the graceful steeple of the Lititz Moravian Church. And it is said that before the church was enlarged, in 1857, the architectural balance and harmony between building and steeple struck the beholder at once as being exactly right. The quietly chaste pulpit of the church also was built after his design.

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