

The Reformed Church in Lancaster County During the Eighteenth Century *¹

By WILLIAM J. HINKE

TODAY, when we celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the coming of Leonard and Michael Amweg, two of the pioneer settlers of Lancaster County, we naturally ask the question: What were the causes which led to the arrival of the first white settlers in this part of Pennsylvania? The answer to this question illustrates again the remarkable fact, which we see illustrated so often in history, namely that apparently insignificant events can bring about far-reaching consequences.

On February 24th, 1708, there appeared before the Provincial Council at Philadelphia a messenger from the Indians at Conestoga, who complained that five Europeans had seated themselves and built houses upon the branches of the Potomac, within this government, and that they had required the Indians to send some of their people with them in search of minerals. The Indians wished to know, whether these persons had any right to settle where they did and whether they had orders to desire the assistance of the Indians?

The Governor reported to the Council, that he had had a personal interview with one of them, named Mitchell, a Swiss, who appeared to be the leader of these men, and who reported that he was engaged by some of his countrymen, who were in treaty with the Crown and the Proprietaries, to search for a convenient tract on which to settle a colony of their people.

The Council ordered all these persons to repair forthwith to Philadelphia and stop at once their roaming about through the province.²

It was this apparently insignificant occurrence in the year 1708, which led to the first settlement of Lancaster County by white people. For, when this Mitchell, or to give him his full German name, Franz Ludwig Michel, returned to Switzerland, his enthusiastic description of the advantages of America were published in a book, entitled "An American Guide," and moreover, a stock company was formed, which was called Ritter & Co., after its chief promoter, George Ritter, of Berne.³ When this company made application to the government of Berne for approval of its colonization plans, the latter regarded this as a welcome oppor-

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tunity to get rid of what they believed to be a very undesirable element of its population, namely the Anabaptists, or as we call them now, the Mennonites. An attempt made in 1709 to deport forcibly 54 Mennonites to Holland, to be sent from there to America, miscarried, because the Dutch refused to allow any to be carried through their country, unless it be of their own free will. Hence when they reached the Dutch frontier, they were at once set free. But ten other Mennonites, who had not been among those forcibly deported, reached London in June, 1710. They left London on June 29th, 1710, on board of the ship "Maria Hope," having ninety-four passengers on board. Fortunately for us, the first Reformed minister who ever came to Pennsylvania, the Rev. Samuel Guldin, was on the same ship, as well as a Quaker preacher, Thomas Chalkley. Both of these have left extended diaries of this journey,⁴ from which we know that this ship, together with several others, was convoyed by a Russian fleet by way of the Orkney Islands, north of England, and that after encountering several storms and calms, they reached Philadelphia, after a journey of eleven weeks, on September 24, 1710. Shortly afterwards, on October 23, 1710, ten thousand acres were surveyed for these Swiss Mennonites on the Pequea creek. This was *the first settlement* of white people in Lancaster County.

The Reformed Church had some little share in this settlement, because a member of the Reformed Church, Franz Ludwig Michel, set the emigration in motion, a Reformed minister from Berne accompanied them and has left us a description of their journey, and in 1713, Samuel Guldin, the Reformed preacher, himself took up 800 acres in what was later Strasburg township, near his Swiss countrymen.

The number of German settlers increased fairly rapidly in the years following 1710. In 1718, when the first list of taxables was drawn up in Conestoga township, there were 78 Dutch settlers out of a total of 118. In 1724, this number had increased to 225.⁵

In 1725, the first traces of Reformed church life appeared in Conestoga, in what is now Upper Leacock township. John Conrad Tempelman, a pious tailor from Heidelberg in the Palatinate, has preserved the record of this important event.

On February 13, 1733, he sent a letter to the Synod of South Holland, in which the following statement occurs:

"The church at Chanastocka had its origin in the year 1725, with a small gathering in houses here and there, with the reading of a sermon and with song and prayer, according to the High German church order, upon all Sundays and holidays, but, on account of the lack of a minister, without the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper."⁶

John Conrad Tempelman is a man, who deserves more than

a passing notice, for to him more than to any other man was due the founding of numerous Reformed congregations, both in Lancaster County, as well as in what is now Lebanon county.

Formerly nothing was known about the antecedents of Tempelman except what Michael Schlatter told us in his famous diary, namely that he was a pious tailor from Heidelberg, in the Palatinate. This led me more than 30 years ago to visit Heidelberg, in order to search the church records there for more information about Tempelman. After a considerable search, through a series of records, I discovered that on September 22, 1717, John Conrad Tempelman, a tailor, son of the late Henry Tempelman, citizen and miller of Weinheim, was married to Anna Maria, daughter of Andrew Barth. This marriage record, you will notice, points to the fact that his father, Henry Tempelman, was a miller at Weinheim, a town in the neighborhood of Heidelberg.

Hence, the search was continued at Weinheim, and soon the fact was brought to light that the father, Henry Tempelmann, was married at Weinheim on April 24, 1691, to Anna Maria Linck, daughter of Philip Linck, an army captain, and furthermore, that John Conrad Tempelmann himself was born at Weinheim and baptized there on March 22, 1692.

While living at Heidelberg Tempelman and his wife had two children, (1) Anna Margaret, born September 11, 1718, and (2) Anna Maria, born March 16, 1721. In these baptismal entries Tempelman is distinctly called "the tailor living at the castle hill." This makes the identification with the Reformed preacher in Lancaster County complete.

Tempelman came to Pennsylvania with his wife and two children sometime between 1721 and 1725, indeed we can narrow the limits to 1722 and 1724. He settled in Conestoga township, where he took up 200 acres of land on January 14, 1734.⁷ He began his religious activity in 1725 as a lay preacher. In 1727, he received assistance from John Philip Boehm, who may well be called the founder of the Reformed Church in Pennsylvania. On October 15th, 1727, Boehm administered the first Reformed communion service in Conestoga to 59 communicants, at what was then called "Die Bergkirch," which is now known as Heller's Church in Upper Leacock township. These communion services were held by Boehm twice a year, while on other Sundays Tempelman acted a lay reader.

In 1730, Boehm could write: "In this district of Chanastocka there is a large number of Reformed people, scattered over twenty miles." Owing to the absence of ordained ministers, Tempelman baptized children as early as 1732. The baptism of Susanna Bauman on September 8, 1732, is on record in a family Bible.

In the spring of 1733, the original single preaching point had

increased to three, under the supervision of Tempelman. They were organized by the election of elders. As Tempelman gives the names of these elders, he enables us to identify them. They were: Heller's church, Cocalico, near Ephrata, and Lancaster. It was during the ministry of Tempelman that the Amweg family arrived at Philadelphia on September 15, 1729. They settled shortly afterwards at Cocalico. On August 27, 1737, a tract of 150 acres was surveyed to Michael Amweg near the Cocalico Creek.⁷

Meanwhile a new Reformed minister had come to the Cocalico region, the Rev. *John Peter Miller*. He was a decided contrast to Tempelman. He was not only descended from a ministerial family, his father, John Mueller (to give his name the proper German form) being a prominent minister in the Palatinate. But he himself had received a thorough university training, so that he could speak and write Latin as fluently as his native tongue. Why he left home we do not know, but one of his friends wrote later that he left his father with thirty guilders in his pocket.⁸ He arrived at Philadelphia on August 29, 1730, as a candidate of theology, who at his request, and after having sustained a very credible examination, was ordained by three eminent Presbyterian ministers at Philadelphia at the end of the year 1730. He preached at first at Philadelphia, Germantown and Skippack, till the fall of 1731. Then he moved to the Goshenhoppen region, where he opened the oldest Reformed church record still in existence in June, 1731. Shortly afterwards he began preaching in Lancaster County. The letter of Tempelman of February 13, 1733, shows that he was preaching at three places. We are left to guess where these places were. But from some evidence available we may infer, with some degree of probability, that they were Muddy Creek, Reyer's near Brickerville and Seltenreich. That Miller was at Muddy Creek is certain from the Lutheran Muddy Creek church record, which shows that between January, 1731, and February, 1734, Miller baptized a number of children at Muddy Creek. Miller made his headquarters at Tulpehocken, where he attracted the attention of Conrad Beissel, the leader of the Seventh-Day Dunkers at Ephrata. Beissel visited him repeatedly and exerted such a remarkable influence over him, that he won him over to his views. In the fall of 1734, Miller retired to private life and in May, 1735, he allowed himself to be baptized by Beissel in a river, by trine immersion, joining thereby the Ephrata community. To make his exit from the Reformed Church as dramatic as possible, Miller gathered all the Reformed and Lutheran books of himself and his followers (said to have been 36 in all) and burned them at Tulpehocken, in the house of one of his friends, Gottfried Fidler.⁹

This conversion of Miller caused great consternation among the Reformed congregations of Lancaster County. Those who

remained faithful turned at once to their old friend, John Philip Boehm, and asked him to help them. He responded and on May 11, 1735, he held a communion service at Heller's church, at which 92 members communed. At the same time a communion service was held at Cocalico, when 60 communed there. This is the first communion service at Cocalico, of which we have any record, although the congregation had been in existence for some time. Boehm states distinctly, that it had been gathered "at a previous occasion."¹⁰ That is, most likely in the year 1730. The second ministry of Boehm in Lancaster County, seems to have extended from 1735 to 1738. During this time he administered the communion twice a year, while Tempelman preached on the intervening Sundays.

It was during this period that we can trace Michael Amweg for the first time in this region. On February 5, 1736, Sophia Louisa, daughter of Michael Amweg, was baptized at Muddy Creek, by the Lutheran pastor, the Rev. John Caspar Stoeber, as he himself recorded in the Lutheran record. This baptism of a Reformed child by a Lutheran minister was, of course, due to the absence of a Reformed minister at Muddy Creek at that time.

In the year 1739, another important leader of the Reformed Church appeared in Lancaster County, the Rev. *John Bartholomew Rieger*. Like Miller, he had been born in the Palatinate and had studied at the university of Heidelberg. He arrived at Philadelphia on September 21, 1731, at the head of a colony of Palatines. From 1731 to 1734, he was pastor at Philadelphia, Germantown and Skippack. Then he ministered to several German congregations in New Jersey, being the first resident Reformed minister in that State. In 1739, he received and accepted a call from the Lancaster congregation. However, he ministered not only to that congregation, but also to several country congregations, especially to Seltenreich, near New Holland, where he opened the oldest church record, and also at Schaefferstown, now in Lebanon County, where he was apparently the first pastor. In 1743, Rieger went to Holland, where he studied medicine at the university of Leyden. When he returned to Lancaster in 1745, he practiced medicine and preached. When Michael Schlatter arrived in the fall of 1746, he found him ministering to Schaefferstown and Seltenreich, in Earl township.

A notable event occurred in 1742, when Count Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravian Church, arrived in the province and made the attempt to unite all the German churches in the province into one religious body, in which all, without giving up their denominational differences in doctrine, might work together in practical church work. In pursuance of this aim a number of missionaries were sent to visit among the Reformed churches. The first of these was *Jacob Lischy*.

According to a report which Lischy prepared in December, 1744,¹¹ he was ministering to at least eight preaching places in Lancaster County. They were: Muddy Creek, Cocalico, Warwick, Donegal, Seltenreich in Earl township, Kissel Hill, Muhlbach and Quittopahilla. The last two are at present in Lebanon County, but at that time they were in Lancaster County, as Lebanon County was not cut off until 1813. This list of Lischy's preaching places shows plainly how rapidly Reformed congregations were forming during the decade from 1740 to 1750. Several of these congregations were definitely organized by Lischy and churches were built.

At Muddy Creek Lischy opened the oldest record, still in existence. The first thing he entered was an elaborate constitution, which covers fourteen pages. It is signed not only by the elders of the congregation, but by all the members, 62 in all, among them appears John Michael Amweg as the 9th signer. This was done on May 19, 1743.

When Lischy left Lancaster County in 1745 and settled in York County, most of these congregations, especially Muddy Creek, Cocalico and Quittopahilla, were again served by Tempelman.

An important year for the history of the Reformed Church in Pennsylvania was the year 1746, when Michael Schlatter arrived as the representative of the Reformed Church of Holland, sent for the purpose of organizing the Reformed congregations of Pennsylvania into a regular Synod, called the Coetus of the Reformed Congregation of Pennsylvania.¹²

Schlatter was a great dynamic force, who, with tireless energy, travelled through the province, visiting everywhere Reformed congregations, installing elders and grouping neighboring churches into pastoral charges. On September 29, 1747, four ministers and twenty-eight elders, representing twenty congregations, met in Philadelphia and organized the Coetus of the Reformed Congregations of Pennsylvania. Only two congregations of Lancaster County were represented, the Schaefferstown church and Seltenreich in Earl township. The Reformed congregation in the city of Lancaster was reported as vacant. Tempelman being unordained, did not appear. But, after his case had been reported to the Fathers in Holland and after their approval had been secured, Tempelman was ordained at Lancaster on October 21, 1752. This was a fitting reward for his many years of faithful labors.

When Michael Schlatter visited Lancaster County in June, 1747, he found Tempelman ministering to Muddy Creek, Cocalico and White Oaks, in the eastern part of the county, and to Quittopahilla, Swatara and Donegal, in what was then the western part of Lancaster County. At that time Tempelman had moved to Swatara and, as he was getting old, Schlatter proposed that he should confine himself to the three congregations nearest to his home.¹³

As Schlatter had found only four ordained ministers in more than twenty congregations, he was persuaded to return to Holland and Germany, for the purpose of securing more ministers for these vacant congregations. This mission was accomplished from February, 1751, to May, 1752. He was successful in finding six young men, most of them in the University of Herborn, who were willing to go with him to America. They were duly commissioned in Holland and arrived in Pennsylvania in August, 1752, being at once assigned to the vacant charges. Two of the new missionaries were sent to Lancaster County, Philip William Otterbein, assigned to Lancaster, and *John Waldschmidt*, assigned to Cocalico and neighboring congregations. The arrival of these new missionaries gave new life to the Reformed churches in Lancaster County, because through them they received a well-educated and settled ministry.

The charge of Waldschmidt comprised, according to his own statement in his church record, Cocalico, Muddy Creek, White Oaks, or Sebastian Reyer's, and Seltenreich, near New Holland.¹⁴ But soon other congregations made their appearance. In 1752, a petition was presented to Coetus from the new congregation in White Oaks. At the Coetus, held at Cocalico in October, 1753, it was resolved that the "congregation at White Oaks be combined with the one at Sebastian Reyer's and be served by Mr. Waldschmidt." This new congregation at White Oaks is today represented by the Jerusalem-Church at Unionville, in Penn township. In 1754, Waldschmidt gave up Muddy Creek, probably through the opposition of Frederick Casimir Mueller, an independent preacher. To compensate him for this loss a new church was built in West Cocalico township, at Michael Amweg's, where he administered the first communion on May 18, 1755. This is the present Swamp Church. The origin of this congregation seems to go back to the year 1749, because in his church record Waldschmidt entered baptisms going back to 1749, which he states, were taken from "a baptism book at Michael Amweg's." It was at first merely a preaching place in a private house, probably that of the Amwegs, but on May 18, 1755, at Whitsuntide, a communion service was celebrated "at Michael Amweg's, in the new church." In the same month, on May 22, 1755, a warrant was issued to Henry Walter, in trust for the Calvinist congregation for a tract of land of $5\frac{3}{8}$ acres, situated in Cocalico township. The survey was returned June 10, 1756. It shows that the tract adjoined the land of John Michael Amweg. The return of the warrant to the Secretary of State's Office was delayed till February 13, 1786, no doubt because the congregation was not ready in 1756 to pay for the land. For some reason, which we cannot now discover with certainty, the ministry of Waldschmidt at the Swamp Church was confined to the year 1755. A communion service was held there on October 5, 1755.

but after the latter date there is a break till 1765. Looking around to see what had happened in the neighboring congregations, we discover that Frederick Casimir Mueller was preaching at Cocalico from 1755 to 1762. It was most likely this independent minister, who preached to various Reformed congregations in Lancaster County, that took the congregation away from Waldschmidt. After 1762, Mueller withdrew to Quittopahilla (now Hill Church near Annville) in Lebanon County.

After Mueller had left, *John Henry Decker*, another independent minister, followed at Cocalico, and, we may suppose, with some degree of probability, that he was also preaching at the Swamp Church, from 1762 to 1764.

Decker was born in 1730, at Markocbel, Nassau, Germany. He attended, as a boy, the Latin school at Hanau, where he matriculated March 27, 1750. He took the oath of allegiance at Philadelphia, September 21, 1751. We find him first preaching at Cacusi, now Hain's Church, near Reading, from 1752 to 1756. Later, from 1762 to 1764, he was at Cocalico, and probably also at the Swamp Church. The only other fact that we know about Decker is that on May 10, 1753, he married Johanna Magdalena Eckert, daughter of John Eckert, a prominent citizen of Reading.¹⁵ What became of him later has not yet been discovered.

After the departure of Decker, the Swamp Church reverted to the pastoral care of Waldschmidt, his first communion service at Swamp being on April 14, 1765, when 56 communicants participated in the service. Waldschmidt remained the pastor of the Swamp Church to the end of his life. The congregation did not grow materially during his ministry. In 1779, there were 80 communicants, in 1784, 62 were recorded as present, while in 1785 only 46 communicants attended at the Swamp Church.

Shortly before the death of Waldschmidt an important transaction took place in the history of the congregation. On February 11, 1786, Jacob Amweg and George Brunner, trustees and wardens of the Calvinist congregation, paid the sum of two pounds and seven shillings for the tract of land on which the church stood. As a result the Commonwealth issued a patent to the congregation on February 14, 1786, for the church land.

When Waldschmidt died on September 14, 1786, his funeral sermon was preached on the following day by the Rev. *John William Boos*, another independent minister, who was not a member of the Coetus of Pennsylvania. He came to Pennsylvania in 1770, and applied to the Coetus for admission, but was refused, because he had no recommendation from the Fathers in Holland. He preached at Reading and in some neighboring congregations at least until the close of the century. From 1787 to 1790, he was preaching at the Swamp Church.

He was followed by *John Conrad Ammann*, an independent minister, about whom very little is known. I found his name and entries in the Hain's record, from 1789 to 1791. Then he appears at the Swamp Church in 1791 and 1792, and finally from 1792 to 1798 he ministered at the Brownback's Church, in Chester County.

Another independent Reformed minister, *John Christian Wilms*, followed Ammann from 1792 to 1802. He arrived in Philadelphia on September 30, 1774. Then we lose sight of him until he appears in 1789 at Seltenreich's, near New Holland. Shortly afterwards, in 1792, he came to Cocalico and the Swamp Church. He appeared several times before Synod and asked for admission, but was refused. However, he maintained himself in his congregation until his death. He died at Cocalico, March 8, 1802, and was buried there in the cemetery adjoining the church.

After the death of Wilms, regular ministers of the Reformed Church again took charge of the Swamp Church, Rev. *Charles Helfenstein* being the first one of these. They kept the congregation true to the Reformed Church ever since.

During the 18th century, the Reformed Church started in 1725 with one congregation, now Heller's Church, in Upper Leacock township. She gradually spread over the county until in 1752, there were ten Reformed congregations, with three ministers. During the second half of the century, the growth seems to have been slightly slower. I can account for only six new congregations during this period. They were Rapho, in Rapho township in 1753 (now extinct); Donegal, now Christ Church, Elizabethtown, in 1760; Maytown, East Donegal township, about 1765; Blasers, West Donegal township, 1767 (now extinct); Manheim, now St. Paul's, at Manheim, about 1769; and Conestoga Centre, Conestoga township, about 1791.

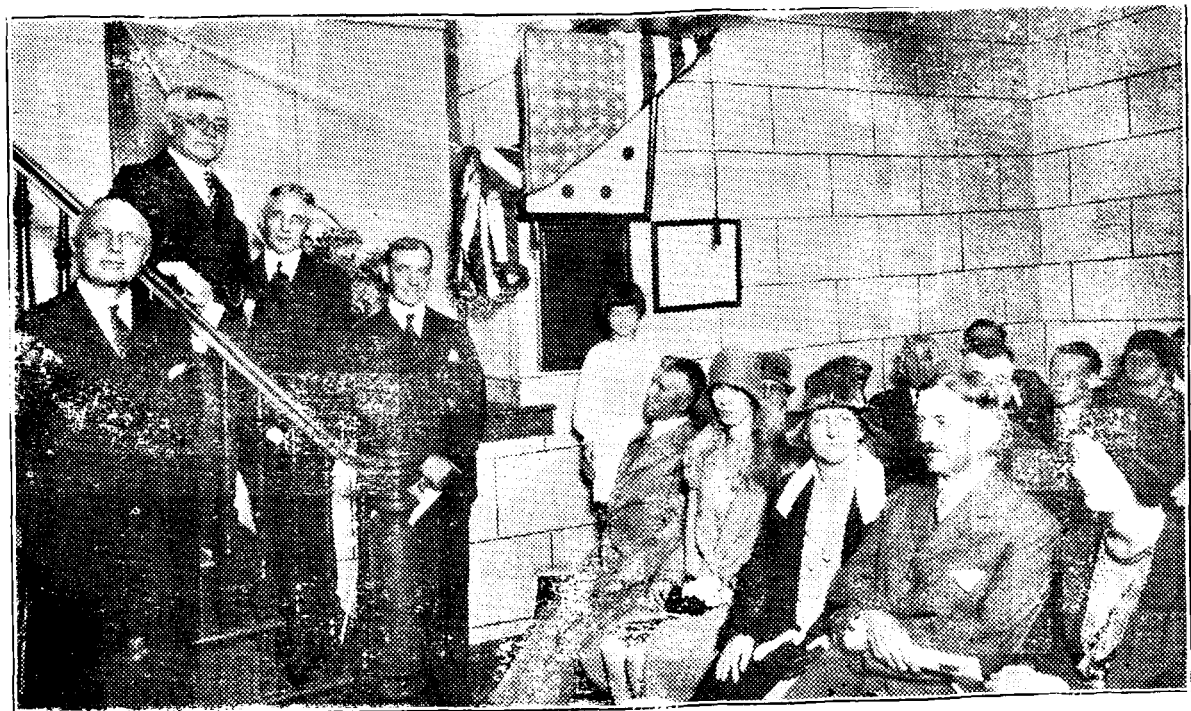
The eighteenth century was for the Reformed Church in Lancaster County a time of hardship and struggle, with few pastors, ministering to widely scattered congregations. It was a time of small beginnings, when little log churches, few ministers and small salaries prevailed. And yet, in spite of all these difficulties and trials, the Church not only maintained her own, but kept up a steady, though slow, growth.

Let us thank God today for the heroic men who piloted the Church during those trying years and enabled her to enter upon a new century of unparalleled prosperity and usefulness. Let us especially remember today the hundreds and thousands of faithful members, who through their perseverance and loyalty saved the Reformed Church from extinction. And above all, let us endeavor to hand down to our sons and daughters undiminished the precious heritage which we have received.

NOTES

- 1 Address delivered in Swamp Church on Sunday, September 29, 1929.
- 2 See *Colonial Records*, II, 403.
- 3 The original diaries and papers of Francis Ludwig Michel are in the city archives of Berne. They were translated and published by the writer in the *Virginia Magazine*, Vol. XXIV, (1916). See also the later documents relating to Michel, published in the *Virginia Magazine*, Vol. XXIX, (1921), pp. 1-17.
- 4 The diary of Thomas Chalkey is quoted by H. Frank Eshleman in his *Historic Background and Annals of the Swiss and German Pioneer Settlers*, Lancaster, 1917, p. 148. The diary of Samuel Guldin was printed in part by Dr. Good in his *History of the Reformed Church in the U. S., 1725-1792*, Reading 1899, pp. 74-83.
- 5 For a more extended account of the Pequea settlement see C. Henry Smith's *The Mennonite Immigration to Pennsylvania*, Lancaster, 1929, pp. 149-176.
- 6 The letter of Tempelman is printed in full in the writer's *Life and Letters of the Rev. John Philip Boehm*, pp. 62-64.
- 7 See Taylor papers in the library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia, Pa.
- 8 For a fully documented sketch of Miller's activity as a Reformed minister in Pennsylvania see the writer's *History of the Goshenhoppen Reformed Charge*, pp. 71-95.
- 9 See *Life of Boehm*, p. 354.
- 10 *Life of Boehm*, p. 275.
- 11 The report of Lischy was translated and published by the writer in the *Reformed Church Review*, Vol. IX, pp. 517-534; Vol. X, pp. 85-98.
- 12 The *Minutes and Letters of the Coetus of Pennsylvania, 1747-1792*, were translated and published by the writer, Philadelphia, 1903.
- 13 See *Life of Schlatter* by Dr. Harbaugh, pp. 158-160.
- 14 The record of Waldschmidt was published by the State in *Pennsylvania Archives*, 6th Series, Vol. VI.
- 15 Recorded in the Host Church record, Berks County.

Professor Wm. J. Hinke, of the Auburn Theological Seminary, is generally recognized as the leading authority on the history of the Reformed Church in America. He has been a close student of the subject since 1897. He has made three visits to Europe for the purpose of studying the historical records, selected parts of which he discovered in Germany, Switzerland and Holland. He is the author of a number of books on the history of the Reformed Church in Pennsylvania.



Principals in the memorial service at Swamp Church, on Sunday, September 29th, 1929. Left to right, Rev. Martin W. Schweitzer, Ph.D., Prof. William J. Hinke, Dr. H. M. J. Klein and Dr. George Leslie Omwake. Standing before the tablet erected to the memory of John Michael Amweg, one of the founders of the church, is Eleanore Omwake, daughter of Dean Howard Omwake, of Franklin and Marshall College. Seated next to her is Prof. Herbert H. Beck.

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