

## **The Lutheran Church and Methodist Revivalism: Central Pennsylvania Perspectives**

The Lutheran Church in the New World was more ethnically diverse and less centrally organized than the German Reformed Church, and as a consequence it began adopting the English language and American ways sooner than its sister denomination. Adoption of the English language carried with it a de-emphasis on the German liturgy, creeds and catechisms. Among the American ways adopted by many congregations was Methodist revivalism. These changes were not deliberately instituted based on theological positions, but they merely reflected “the American way” of doing things.

Eventually there was a conservative backlash for retaining the German language, reclaiming the historic creeds and catechisms of Lutheranism, restoring the traditional liturgies of the denomination, and re-thinking the use of revivalism. Prominent church leaders lined up on both sides of the issue. Competing congregations and conferences were formed (explaining why some relatively small Central Pennsylvania towns still have two ELCA congregations to this day), and competing colleges and seminaries were opened.

The controversy in the Lutheran Church was not as fierce and clear-cut as it was for the Reformed Church, mainly because each faction was headed by respected church leaders who were willing to appreciate some of the positions of the other side. In addition, there was much middle ground and even some adjusting of positions by key persons. The good news is that there were no major denominational splits, defections or dismissals as there were in the Reformed Church. The bad news is that it is difficult to present a simplistic view as to which persons, congregations and institutions were on which side and exactly what were the differences in their positions.

In Pennsylvania it may be said that the Ministerium<sup>1</sup> represented the conservative pro-German faction in favor of restoring the historic confessions and catechisms, while the General Synod<sup>2</sup> represented the pro-American faction in favor of employing the “new measures.” The groups eventually blended together as the passion for revivalism cooled over time (as it eventually did even in Methodism). The best way to approach the topic may be to give a rather detailed chronological presentation of the major Lutheran personalities and incidents in

---

<sup>1</sup> The “Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States” was organized in Philadelphia in 1748 by Henry Melchior Muhlenberg and became the parent body of mainstream German Lutheranism in the region. At first tolerant of Americanization of the Lutheran Church, this body was home to most of those who sought to restore more traditional Lutheran practice and theology.

<sup>2</sup> The General Synod was an umbrella that included geographic Synods across the country. While the General Synod was more tolerant of Americanization and diversity than the Ministerium, it would be a gross oversimplification to state that that body supported the new measures. Some Synods were more tolerant than others – and individual congregations within some Synods covered the entire theological spectrum, depending mainly on the position of the pastor.

one Central Pennsylvania town that relate to that denomination's struggle to come to terms with Methodist revivalism, and then to conclude with a representative account of incidents from other locations. Of all the towns whose stories could be inserted at this point, Selinsgrove is chosen because of its additional connection to Susquehanna University.

### **Selinsgrove**

Organized about 1790, First Lutheran Church in Selinsgrove was affiliated with the Ministerium. Accounts of its interactions with Methodist revivalism are given in its conference's 1898 history,<sup>3</sup> which is part of the Lutheran collection at our conference archives: *In 1843 a split occurred in the congregation on account of the introduction of the so-called "new measures." The pastor, with a number of Lutherans, withdrew and organized a second Lutheran congregation, which now belongs to the General Synod. The fight was long and bitter, and for many years retarded the work of the church* (page 153).

It was also in 1843 that Henry Ziegler<sup>4</sup> graduated from Gettysburg Seminary, headed by new measure advocate S.S. Schmucker.<sup>5</sup> Zeigler was sent immediately to aid J.P. Shindel,<sup>6</sup> the pastor at Selinsgrove who led the break-away congregation. While living in the area, Ziegler stayed with prominent local businessman John App, whose daughter he married in 1844.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jubilee Memorial Volume of the Danville Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States, published by the Danville Conference in 1898. This work will be identified for the remainder of this paper as the Danville Conference History.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Ziegler (1816-1898) left Selinsgrove to become a circuit rider equal to any Methodist in the "Missionary Synod [later the Pittsburgh Synod] of the Evangelical Lutheran Church." In his five years there, he "traveled 11,074 miles, preached 450 services in English and 180 in German, gave 161 catechetical lectures, baptized 92 children and organized 7 churches." He then "settled" for a few years in Williamsport when a revival he held there led to the founding of that city's St. Mark's Church. See "Henry Ziegler: Missionary Preacher and Teacher" by Donald Housley in the winter 1996 (vol.7, no. 2) Newsletter of the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799-1873) was the chief founder of the General Synod in 1820 and Gettysburg Seminary in 1826, where he served as head of the faculty until 1864. He was a controversial theologian that the conservatives considered a threat to true Lutheranism. In addition to his support of the new measures, he argued for replacing the Augsburg Confession with an updated version and against the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper. While he is generally named among the great American Lutherans, the classic Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge states his theological position was a mix of "Puritanism, Pietism, and shallow Rationalism" rather than Lutheranism - but consider the source: Philip Schaff (1819-1893) was the Reformed minister who worked with John Williamson Nevin to produce the Mercersburg Theology, and Johann Jakob Herzog (1805-1882) was a European Lutheran with little sympathy for the Americanization of religion.

<sup>6</sup> John Peter Shindel (1787-1853) was one of the most effective and ardent supporters of the new measures within Central Pennsylvania Lutheranism. His surname is also variously rendered Shindle and Schindel. True to his Lutheran heritage, he named one son Martin Luther Shindel and another Phillip Melancthon Shindel. Three of his sons (Jeremiah, John P. Jr., and Martin L.) became Lutheran pastors who tolerated, but did not ardently support, the new measures.

In 1847 Shindel led the organization<sup>7</sup> and incorporation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of East Pennsylvania. Later that same year the court case “App vs. Lutheran Congregation” brought to a head the “long and bitter” fight alluded to in the history of the First Lutheran Church. John App’s brother Leonard App had been a trustee at the time of the 1843 congregational split, and some of the assets of First Lutheran Church were in his care. As the Apps had joined a majority of the church leadership and membership in forming the new congregation, which was still Lutheran, they considered themselves the rightful owners of the assets in question. The ten-page court decision that finally ended the claim of the “new Lutherans” to assets that had been a part of First Lutheran gives many insights into the congregational split.

By the 1850’s, the conservative element within the Ministerium had gained considerable influence within the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg and the influence of the aging S.S. Schmucker had diminished.<sup>8</sup> This prompted the “new Lutherans” in the greater Selinsgrove area to band together to establish an institution that supported the use of the “new measures” and aggressive missionary outreach – and so the Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Institute [now Susquehanna University] was founded in 1858. Among the prized Lutheran materials at the conference archives is an original 1859 printing of the “addresses, inaugurals and charges delivered in Selin’s Grove” by Henry Ziegler and others at the school’s founding. It was Zeigler who eventually became the chief theologian, administrator and financial backer of the Institute until his health forced him to resign in 1881.

Meanwhile the two competing Lutheran congregations in Selinsgrove, First Lutheran of the Pennsylvania Ministerium and Trinity Lutheran of the East Pennsylvania Synod [after 1867, the Susquehanna Synod], continued to exist. The Pennsylvania Ministerium was one of 13 bodies in the nation’s conservative General Council, whose organization the Ministerium had spearheaded in 1867. The Susquehanna Synod was one of the bodies in the country’s General Synod. In 1918 the General Council and General Synod congregations merged to form

---

<sup>7</sup> Other sources given May 3, 1842, as the organization of the East Pennsylvania Synod, with J.P. Shindel as its first president. The 1847 date given here is the date for its legal incorporation in the State of Pennsylvania. What actually occurred in 1842 is unclear. Ministerium records indicate that Shindel was president of that body’s Sixth [later Danville] Conference on August 1, 1842.

<sup>8</sup> As it so happened, the conservatives were never able to gain complete control at Gettysburg. A political and theological battle raged there for several years until the conservatives finally realized that they could never place one of their men at the head and eliminate the liberals entirely. And so in 1864, the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia was formed by the Ministerium. The formal opening address was given by Beale Melancthon Schmucker (1827-1888), who did not share the views of his prominent father S.S. Schmucker. The leader of the new seminary was another rebellious son, Charles Porterfield Krauth (1823-1883), whose father Charles Philip Krauth (1797-1867) had been the first president of Gettysburg College [then called Pennsylvania College] from 1834-1850 and had also served on the faculty at the seminary. It is reported, however, that the elder Krauth later “saw the light” and eventually supported the theological position of his more conservative son.

the United Lutheran Church in America – which, following a series of subsequent denomination unions, is now part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (i.e., the ELCA). Finally, in 1971, First Lutheran and Trinity Lutheran merged to become Sharon Lutheran Church<sup>9</sup> and the “long and bitter” fight was over.

### **Selinsgrove Epilogue**

The preceding section gives a simplistic account of the events in Selinsgrove and the tensions between the Lutheranism of the conservative/confessional Pennsylvania Ministerium and that of the progressive/revivalistic General Synod. But as was stated earlier, the divisions were not always clear cut and there was a considerable amount of middle ground.

First, apparently First Lutheran was not in the Pennsylvania Ministerium continuously. The previously referenced Danville Conference History states: *For a number of years the congregation belonged, first, to the West Pennsylvania Synod, later to the Central [Pennsylvania] Synod; but in 1868 it was received into the Ministerium of Pennsylvania (to which it had originally belonged) through the efforts of Rev. J.W. Early, the pastor at that time* (page 153). In fact, at the time of the 1843 split, the congregation was part of the “Americanized” West Pennsylvania Synod, which apparently was too middle-of-the road for J.P. Shindel and others who organized the competing revivalistic East Pennsylvania Synod.

Some insight into the move of First Church back to the Ministerium is given in the Danville Conference History account of Zion Lutheran Church in Kratzerville, which was in the same parish: *The congregation was organized by a minister in connection with our Ministerium and for years it maintained its connection with this body. The congregation refused to be drawn away by the revival excitement of later years, although it was brought into numerous conflicts on account of it. At what time it ceased its connection with the Ministerium is not known, but for many years it was connected with the Central Pennsylvania Synod and was served by pastors of the same. But when the Rev. J.W. Early became the pastor, in 1868, the congregation asked to be dismissed to our Ministerium. The Central [Pennsylvania] Synod hesitated to grant this request, questioned the validity of Rev. Early’s election, and sent a committee to the congregation to investigate matters and , if possible, avert the withdrawal. But the congregation was determined to carry out its intention, made application, and was received into the Ministerium in 1868. At the same time the congregation at Selinsgrove and the congregations constituting the Freeburg Parish, with their pastor the Rev. C.G. Erlennmeyer, were received into the Ministerium of Pennsylvania. With this movement began the enlargement of the work of the Ministerium in this part of Pennsylvania, which has resulted in the establishment of four large parishes in this county, with fifteen congregations.*

The picture is further muddled by a deeper consideration of Rev. J.P. Shindel and his ministerial sons. At the time of the 1843 split in Selinsgrove,

---

<sup>9</sup> The united congregation erected a new building at the former First Lutheran site in 1977, and the former Trinity Lutheran building is now the Masonic Hall.

First Church was part of the very large Sunbury Parish (which extended from Lykens Valley to Catawissa, and from Shamokin to Selinsgrove) that Shindel served for over 40 years, from 1812 to 1853. He definitely led the “new Lutherans” in Selinsgrove out of their former synod and into the newly-formed revivalistic East Pennsylvania Synod, and it appears that is what happened in most of the other congregations in the parish. The history of Zion Lutheran Church in Sunbury, for example, states: *In 1840-2 there was much agitation in the Lutheran church over the “new measures” and the language question. Under Rev. Shindel’s leadership the congregation favored the “new measures” and the use of the English language and joined the newly organized East Pennsylvania Synod.* One notable exception to this was the Kratzerville Zion congregation, which stayed behind in the West Pennsylvania Synod with Selinsgrove First.

While no authoritative Lutheran source presents a timeline that puts all the pieces together, the following reconstruction appears to be consistent with the available evidence.

1. J.P. Shindel and the large Sunbury parish (including Selinsgrove) was originally part of the Pennsylvania Ministerium. In fact, J.P. Shindel was the president of what later became the Danville Conference of the Pennsylvania Ministerium at its annual sessions of 1838, 1839 and 1842.
2. Following the annual conference of 1842, Shindel and the Sunbury parish transferred from the Ministerium to the West Pennsylvania Synod. Apparently the orientation and desires of the pastor played the major role in determining the affiliation of the congregation(s) to which he was called.
3. The 1843 split in the Selinsgrove congregation into Selinsgrove First and Selinsgrove Trinity forced Shindel and the Sunbury parish (including Selinsgrove Trinity) to leave the West Pennsylvania Synod and eventually form the East Pennsylvania Synod. Despite their differences and the apparent animosity involved, both the West Pennsylvania Synod and the East Pennsylvania Synod operated under the umbrella of the General Synod.
4. At some point the West Pennsylvania Synod was divided and its eastern portion (including Selinsgrove First and Kratzerville Zion) became the Central Pennsylvania Synod.
5. In 1867 the Susquehanna Conference of the East Pennsylvania Synod (including Selinsgrove Trinity) became the Susquehanna Synod. This also included most of the other congregations of the former large Sunbury parish, which by now involved several parishes.
6. In 1868 Selinsgrove First and Kratzerville Zion called a new pastor who led them out of the Central Pennsylvania Synod and back to the Danville Conference of the Pennsylvania Ministerium.

It was in this state of affairs (with Selinsgrove First and Kratzerville Zion in the Danville Conference of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, and Selinsgrove Trinity and most of the other former Sunbury parish in the Susquehanna Synod) that things continued for the next several decades. In 1898 (the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pennsylvania Ministerium) the Danville Conference published its history,

and in 1917 (the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding) the Susquehanna Synod published its history. The surprising fact is that both histories claimed and portrayed the now sainted J.P. Shindel and his sons as loyal members. A side by side comparison of the two versions makes for very interesting reading.

Of special note is the account of J.P. Shindel, with the recaptured German spelling of his surname, given by the Danville Conference: *John Peter Schindel was a regular member of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, from the time of his reception until 1842. During the excitement in connection with the introduction of the so-called "New Measures," he allowed himself to be captivated thereby and passed through many sad experiences in consequence thereof, especially so in Selinsgrove and in Lykens Valley. He however never lost his interest in and his fondness for catechizing the young and receiving them regularly and properly into Church connection. From the sad experiences which he had made, he frequently cautioned his two sons, then in the ministry, to guard against such a course, and both sons wisely heeded the father's advice* (page 265ff).

The two sons alluded to are Jeremiah Shindel (1807-1870) and John Peter Shindel Jr (1810-1888). The article was written by Rev. Jacob D. Schindel – a son of Jeremiah, and one of four of J.P. Shindel's grandsons to study for the Lutheran ministry. The tone of the article reflects the fact that J.D. Schindel was then [1898] a representative of the Pennsylvania Ministerium on the board of directors of the Philadelphia Seminary, and his son was then a ministerial student there. The son not alluded to is Martin Luther Shindel (1827-?) who entered the ministry in 1861 (i.e., after the death of his father) and spent his entire ministry in the East Pennsylvania and Susquehanna Synods.

### **Other Central Pennsylvania Locations**

(1) A Cumberland County product of Lutheran revivalism turned out to be one of its severest theological critics.

While most American Lutheran congregations, regardless of their original ethnic orientations or theological positions or mother conferences, are now part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), there are a few significant exceptions. Officially named the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in America (CLBA), the Lutheran Brethren denomination headquartered in Fergus Falls MN was founded by Norwegian-American Lutherans who fully embraced the new measures, and it continues today as a small body with a remarkable blend of Lutheran theology and revivalistic practices. At the other end of the spectrum are the Wisconsin Synod [officially the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)] and Missouri Synod [officially the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS)] denominations which never embraced the new measures and consider mainstream Lutheranism as extremely liberal in both theology and practice. Headquartered in St. Louis MO, the LCMS is the larger of these bodies and has several congregations in Central Pennsylvania.

The following account<sup>10</sup> tells the story of LCMS theologian Matthias Loy (1825-1919) and makes no attempt to hide its disapproval of Methodist revivalism: *Matthias Loy was the fourth of seven children born to two impoverished tenant farmers living as tenant farmers in the Blue Mountains of Cumberland County. Across the country great revivals were in progress – and the enthusiasm affected the members of the Zion Lutheran Church in Harrisburg. The pastor, the Reverend C.W. Schaeffer, a “New Measures Lutheran” of the Samuel Simon Schmucker stripe, was conducting “protracted meetings.” Matthew Loy showed up and presented himself at the “anxious bench.” After “being saved” Loy enrolled in an adult class and was received into the Lutheran Church. He resolved to become a minister, hoping to attend Gettysburg Theological Seminary, then the center of liberalism in the Lutheran Church. Little did Loy realize how far his spiritual legacy of Pietism, Secularism, Deism, Calvinism, Unionism, Revivalism, and New Measures Lutheranism (which even allowed him to be a member of the Masonic Lodge) was from the Lutheran Orthodoxy of Martin Luther and the Confessions of the Church. He had never even heard of the Book of Concord!*<sup>11</sup>

When Loy moved to Ohio for health reasons, the article continues, he was surprised to learn of the existence of an Ohio Synod and a Columbus theological school [and] promptly enrolled in the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbus. It was in Columbus that young Loy was exposed to Orthodox Lutheranism for the very first time in his life. Within a few months Loy had moved from “American Lutheranism” of the S.S. Schmucker variety to a staunch and life-long Confessionalism.

(2) Evangelical Association work in upper Dauphin County is reported to have begun when revivalism entered the Lutheran Church there.

One account<sup>12</sup> describes the events as follows. *About 1840 differences developed in the Lutheran churches which extended over a large area. These differences manifested themselves in Simeon’s Congregation in Gratz. The dissenting faction known as the “New Measures” party left the church north of town and organized a new congregation. It was the new group that built the present Evangelical Congregational Church in 1846... Dr. Isaiah S. Schminky organized what was first spoken of as a Methodist Church... Soon afterward it was known as an Evangelical Association Church. Possibly Dr.*

---

<sup>10</sup> “Matthias Loy: Theologian of American Lutheran Orthodoxy,” by C. George Fry, appeared in *The Springfielder*, 38:4 (October 1974), 320-333. This is a quarterly publication of Concordia Seminary (Springfield IL) of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, one of Lutheranism’s more conservative bodies and not part of the ELCA. There are only a few LCMS congregations within Central Pennsylvania.

<sup>11</sup> The author refers to several distinctives of the LCMS. Membership in Masonic-type lodges and secret societies is forbidden and grounds for dismissal from the church. The Book of Concord (namesake of the denomination’s Concordia Seminary and its many Concordia Colleges) is a collection of historic creeds, catechisms and writings of Martin Luther, Phillip Melancthon, and other key Lutheran figures that the LCMS considers to hold the unalterable doctrines of true Lutheranism.

<sup>12</sup> *A History of the work of the Evangelical Congregational Churches of Herndon and Mandata*, compiled and published in 1974 under the leadership of Charles Denkovich, page 18. The Evangelical Congregational denomination was created by the former United Evangelical churches that stayed out of the 1922 re-union with the Evangelical Association which created the Evangelical Church.

*Schminky had acted originally for the Evangelical Association, because many years ago people spoke of the Evangelicals as German Methodists.*

A second account<sup>13</sup> from the Lutheran perspective, supports the primary details of the preceding account: *With the close of the pastorate of Rev. Schindel, sensational religion, under the popular name of “new measures,” had been introduced, so that both the Lutheran and Reformed congregations became very much distracted. The “new measures” party separated from the old congregation, and, under the guidance of Rev. C.F. Stoever, erected the other church in town. The new congregation did not prosper, and after a number of years, the property was sold to the Evangelical Association, by whom it is still held.*

(3) In the Snyder/Union County area, two former Evangelical Association congregations actually became Lutheran churches associated with the General Synod.

During the 1894 split in the Evangelical Association, the vast majority of the Central Pennsylvania Conference congregations sided with the more progressive United Evangelical Church that favored the English language, less denominational structure, and worship that was less liturgical and more revivalistic. Persons that chose to remain in the mother denomination, even though the courts awarded them possession of the church buildings, were in such a minority that they had to be served from the East Pennsylvania Conference – and most of them eventually ceased to exist. Two such Evangelical Association remnant congregations and buildings actually became Lutheran – where the continued use of the German language, the strong denominational structure, and the more liturgical and less revivalistic worship met the needs of the remaining persons. Those who left to form United Evangelical congregations were the founders of the present Faith Hoovers and New Columbia Trinity United Methodist Churches. Those who became Lutheran were the founders of St. Paul Lutheran Church south of Selinsgrove on Middle Creek Road and the former Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Columbia on Main Street (which has since merged into St. John’s Lutheran Church west of West Milton to create the United in Christ Lutheran Church, and the former Evangelical Association building in New Columbia now houses an Hispanic Mennonite congregation).

---

<sup>13</sup> Danville Conference History, pages 99-100.