

# They Came and Brought Their Faiths

*Adapted from*

*"Two Hundred Twenty-Five Years History of Friedens Lutheran Church, 1745-1970"*

*written in 1970 by Lalah G. Apple (1904-1974) for its 225th Anniversary.*

*A member of the Friedens Church, Miss Apple is buried at Friedens.*

To understand the causes that brought the early settlers to North Carolina, we must go back to European history and review the struggle known as The Thirty Years War. Religious hatred and troubles over church lands in the region known as the Palatinate produced dramatic changes in lives of God fearing natives. That historic Palatinate is now a region in southwestern Germany that occupies roughly the southernmost quarter of the German federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate (Rheinland-Pfalz). These long fruitful European native lands of theirs were desolated by this war. The French invasion of the Rhine region caused the splendid homes of the Palatines to be laid waste. These devastating changes caused large numbers of this liberty-loving people to flee to America.

Why far off America? The new world offered a place of retreat for peace and security. Many natives of the Palatine Region, accompanied by some disgruntled Swiss and French, poured into Pennsylvania. This movement began about 1688, and continued up to 1775. Archives of that period show that more than 30,000 males over sixteen had come over. The Lords Proprietors of Carolina were anxious to obtain these settlers and offered fine terms to induce them to come on farther South. Largely from this soon overcrowded Pennsylvania company of transplants the first immigrants to central North Carolina were drawn. This accounts for the fact that almost every family name now found in certain counties of eastern Pennsylvania now also are found in this special section of North Carolina. Alamance, Chatham, Davidson, Forsyth, Guilford, and other North Carolina counties in this central section became the final destination homes of these long suffering people.

How did they make this last overland journey of Faith? The wagon road from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, over 400 miles long, saw Lutherans come in large numbers from 1670 to 1750. Pennsylvania had at that time 60,000 settlers of German ancestry, the majority of whom were of the Lutheran faith. In 1715 Rev. Justus Falckner had organized the first Lutheran Church in the United States at Falckner's Swamp, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. In 1737 Rev. John Ulrich Giesendanner organized a congregation of Lutherans.

Beginning about 1740 they streamed into that rich North Carolina territory along the waters of Haw River, Reedy Fork, the Eno, Alamance, Travis Creek, Beaver Creek, and Deep River. In the North Carolina Historical Review, Vol. VII, p. 126, we find the statement, quoted from an old letter written by a Lutheran minister: "The German settlement in Guilford County is 28 miles long and 18 miles wide. Many hundreds of families live here close together" .

Contrary to the rule with certain other denominations, the Lutherans did not think it necessary to wait for regular ministers in order to begin their church work. They set up their church services upon their arrival here, and with their duly elected elders and deacons conducted regular religious worship. The historian, R. D. W. Connor, says up to this point: "as a rule the Germans came into North Carolina as organized bodies in search of religious freedom and fields for missionary activity". This explains how several Lutheran churches have a history running back from 20 to 30 years earlier than the coming of the first regular Lutheran ministers into North Carolina.

These earliest settlements were along the Haw and Yadkin rivers. The five oldest Lutheran churches in this state are: Friedens and Lows in Guilford County; Zion or Organ Church, Rowan County; St. John's in Salisbury, Rowan County; and St. John's Church in Cabarrus County. Thus we see that the Haw River group of Orange County (now Guilford County) and the Yadkin River group must be regarded as the parent Lutheran churches of the entire state.

The historian Connor says: "In the year of 1771 the total German population of Rowan, Orange, Mecklenburg, and Tryon counties must have been not less than 15,000". This included about 10,000 Lutherans, 4,000 Reformed and 1,000 Moravians. These Lutheran and Reformed people were largely Palatinate exiles, while the Moravians had come from Bohemia and Herrnhut. The rich history of these early days in this territory must include the story of five early denominations; Lutheran, Reformed, Moravian, Quaker and Scotch-Irish Presbyterian. It is fortunate, indeed, that all these were lovers of home, education, religion and freedom, and they have left a rich heritage for all succeeding time.

Dr. W. W. Moore states that Presbyterians were taking up homes along the Haw and Eno rivers in 1738. Rev. Henry Patillo became pastor of Hawfields in 1765; Buffalo Church was organized in 1756; Alamance in 1762; and in 1764 Rev. David Caldwell arrived. The Presbyterian synods of New York and Philadelphia sent missionaries into this section in 1745 and 1758. The Nottingham Company of Pennsylvania bought a large tract for settlement along the waters of Buffalo and Reedy Fork.

The Quakers organized Cane Creek as early as 1751 following an encampment known as Snow Camp; Center in 1753; New Garden in 1754; and Deep River in 1758. The Reformed people came along with the Lutherans, and in many cases joined them in union houses of worship as at Beaver Creek from which sprang both Lows Lutheran, and Brick Reformed churches. In these earlier days the church houses were generally built by the united efforts of both the Lutherans and the Reformed people. Such was the case with what we now know as Friedens Church. It was a union church and was organized about the same time as Brick Church, which is located six miles, south of Gibsonville, and it is not improbable that both churches were organized by the same minister. It was first known as "Stahakers Church," or "Sshaakers Church". Older people will recall that it was often called as if spelled "Shoemakers Church"; this coming as the modern pronunciation.

The first congregational group is supposed to have been formed about 1771; the date is not exactly clear. Rev. Samuel Suther was then preaching in a small log house built by the Lutherans and the Reformed people on the spot where the present Low's Lutheran Church now stands about ten miles south of Gibsonville.

It is probable that this same Rev. Samuel Suther held the first services on the grounds of what is now Friedens Church. Suther was a Swiss, born in 1722, and taught school and preached in various parts of Virginia, Carolina, Georgia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. In 1768 he was preaching in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, and was in full sympathy with those who signed the Mecklenburg Declaration; he was an ardent patriot, and greatly hated by the Tories. In 1791 the State of North Carolina had made a grant of land to the church. This grant had given Friedens fourteen acres. This land is still held by the church.

The Lutherans and the Reformed people were the original joint owners of the church property at Friedens, and each denomination either conducted its own services separately or held joint services as desired. As the Reformed people developed their interests at Brick Church, and later at Mt. Hope they gave less and less of their attention to their interests at Friedens.

In 1828 Rev. John H. Crawford came as the Brick Church pastor, and remained until 1840. During these twelve years the Reformed congregation at Friedens was allowed to become scattered and the organization of the Reformed people at this place disintegrated. It was during this period, about 1830 to 1840, that the use of the foreign language was dropped in the pulpit services altogether and all the services were conducted in English. All church records were kept in the German language until 1830.

During this period of about seventy years these two denominations held joint interests in church and parsonage property; often in joint services; and frequently were ministered by the same pastor regardless of denomination, when either pulpit was vacant. In 1855 under the leadership of Rev. G. W. Welker, a Reformed minister, the connection of the Reformed members was altogether organized into a new church known as St. Marks Reformed Church in the vicinity of what was known as Boones Station, a spot about two miles south of the present Elon College, where they still worship. It was many years later, however, before their Financial claims of interest in the property of the Friedens pastorate were fully and finally adjusted to the satisfaction of all.

Both the Lutheran and the Reformed church spoke the foreign tongue. German was the main language spoken by the pastors prior to this period. The name Friedens comes from the German word Fried-e (n), whose plural is Friedens meaning peace and tranquility.

The first English Lutheran preacher in North Carolina was Rev. Robert Johnson Miller, a native of Baldovia, Angusshire, near Dundee, Scotland, born in 1758, reaching this country in 1774. He came south with General Greene's Army during the Revolutionary War and remained here to preach after peace was declared. The first ecclesiastical assembly of the Lutheran church in North Carolina was held in Salisbury in May, 1794, and this man, the Rev. R. J. Miller was the first minister ordained by what is known as the Lutheran Ministerium.

In a copy of the minutes of a Lutheran Virginia Conference held in 1806 in Rockingham County, Virginia, we find this reference to Friedens Church: "In that region which lies partly in Orange and partly in Guilford counties there are three Lutheran churches, three Reformed churches and one joint church named Friedens."

In 1801 Rev. Phillip Henkle was called to serve as Lutheran pastor and remained until 1806 when he accepted a call to Lincoln County. In the minutes of the synod held in 1810 at Organ Church in Rowan County there is this interesting statement: "Rev. Markart 's pastorate: Pilgrims, Beek's Schweiszguth (Swicegood) now Sandy Creek, Lou's (now Low's) Friedens, Graves (now St. Paul's)." Certainly the field was large enough to claim the full energies of any man!