

# THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH AND THE CONGREGATION

*Let us go into the house of the Lord.  
Psalm 122:1*

By the year 1886 the building of the new church, the Reformed Congregation in Kutztown already had a 150 year history. Known first as the Maxatawny Congregation it was able in 1740 to pledge four pounds annually (about \$22.00) toward the support of a traveling pastor. This congregation was assisted in religious services and organization by the Rev. Mr. John Philip Boehm, of Faulkner's Swamp Church, and by the Rev. Mr. Michael Schlatter, who organized churches of the region into a group under the direction and financial aid of the Holland Reformed Church, with headquarters in Amsterdam. By 1752 the Maxatawny Congregation had a church building along the Saucony Creek southeast of Kutztown with Philip Jacob Michael as Pastor.

As would be expected, this congregation underwent many changes in this period of revolution and growth. In 1772, the Rev. Mr. John Heinrich Helferich, considered to be the father of the Reformed Churches of this area, was assigned to the Maxatawny Congregation and eight other churches. On April 27, 1793, in Lancaster, the German Reformed Churches, in Pennsylvania and adjacent states, organized as an American denomination.

The Reformed and Lutheran congregations of Kutztown formed a Union Church on November 9, 1789, and by 1790 had placed the cornerstone of the white frame church in which both congregations worshiped amicably for many years. Under this arrangement each congregation had its own pastor and the right to use the church on alternate Sundays and the six days that followed. There was one church council whose members were chosen from the two congregations. Money was placed in a common treasury and all expenses of whatever nature were paid from this fund. After fire had partially destroyed the original building, it was decided, on a vote of 279 to 77, to construct a new building. The church was completed in 1876 and is in use today as the Sunday School building of St. John's United Church of Christ at the corner of North Whiteoak and West Walnut Streets.

A Union Sunday School had functioned in connection with the church since 1826. The general procedure was that a Reformed superintendent presided one Sunday and a Lutheran superintendent the next, with teachers drawn from both congregations serving each week. On May 17, 1863, it was decided by the Reformed membership to form its own Sunday School. Since the plan was to meet every Sunday, it was necessary to find another building in which to meet. They first met in the public

school located on South Whiteoak Street and afterwards moved to the old school building at the eastern end of the Union Church property. Upon completion of the new Union Church in 1876, the Reformed Sunday School moved to the basement of this building for they, too, had helped to build it.

But the new constitution had added this clause:

*Das basement soll sei fur den gebrauch einer Reformiert-Luderischen sonntagschule und fer den confirmanden unterricht.*

(This basement shall be for the use of one Reformed-Lutheran Sunday School and for catechetical instruction.)

This meant that either the Reformed Sunday School could rejoin the Union Sunday School or they could leave the premises. They decided on the latter course. The group realized that a permanent location was much to be desired for the growth and progress of the Sunday School so they called a meeting on October 14, 1885, to plan for the future.

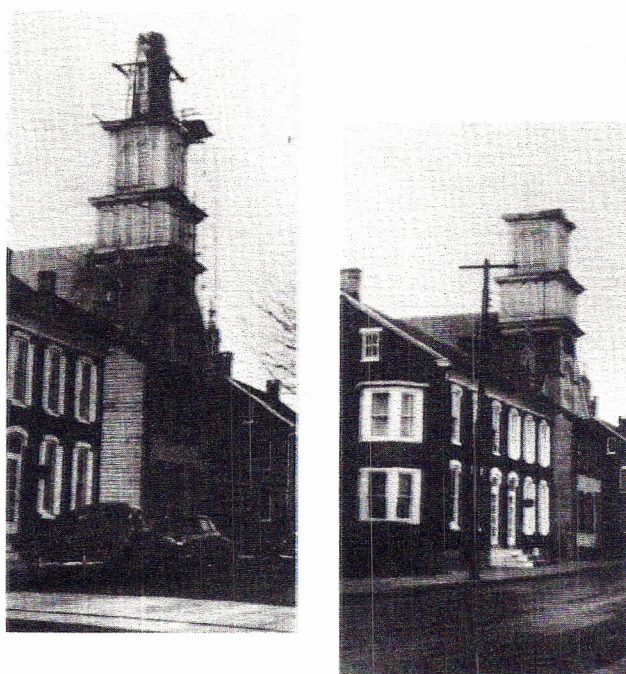
A committee was appointed to canvass the members to determine the sentiment on building a chapel. The committee returned to report bright hopes and wholehearted support of the undertaking. Until the plan was accomplished, however, the Sunday School again had to find temporary shelter. The Evangelical Church provided space for the school for one year. Then, once more, they returned to the public school on South Whiteoak Street on the site of the present bottling works.

Trustees were elected and they took immediate steps to procure a suitable site. A 60 foot lot was purchased from U. J. Miller for \$630.00 — \$10.50 per front foot. Mr. Miller donated \$30.00, reducing the price to \$600.00. Later four additional feet were purchased at the same rate. Enthusiasm prevailed and operations began.

An architect or even a general contractor was not employed. As we turn the pages of the "minit" book we move from foundation, to brick work, to stairway, to gallery, to steeple. Guided by their own practical knowledge, these men simply started at the foundation and worked up. Masons were paid \$1.80 per day for "a full hand," carpenters were paid \$1.70 per day, unskilled workers were paid \$1.00 per day. The committee reserved the right to reduce wages should the prevailing wage in the community come down during construction. On January 8, 1887, two members of the committee were appointed "to make arrangements with the carpenters and painters as to re-



The steeple was removed as unsafe in 1949 and replaced by a lower, open belfry from which the original bell still rings. An excerpt from an article in THE PATRIOT, Kutztown, Pennsylvania, records interesting facts about the steeple.



"The weather vane arrow was the first part to be taken off. Its perforated date is 1886 . . . It is twelve feet high and its width is four-and-a-half feet. Made of zinc and lead, the combined weight is 75 pounds.

"The distance from the ground to the top of the weather vane is 130 feet. This includes the belfry, at a height of 70 feet; the steeple, 48 feet; and the crown and weather vane, 12 feet."

Extensive alterations to the church exterior began in 1952. Exterior side walls of the present church building were also refaced at this time. Paul O. DeRagon, architect and member, designed the new facade and planned for safety features. The cost of the renovations was \$30,812.88, which was completely paid by 1956. During the renovations, the congregation inserted a stainless steel vacuum sealed box in a second cornerstone containing items of interest relating to the life of St. Paul's congregation. This cornerstone is located on the northeast corner of the church.

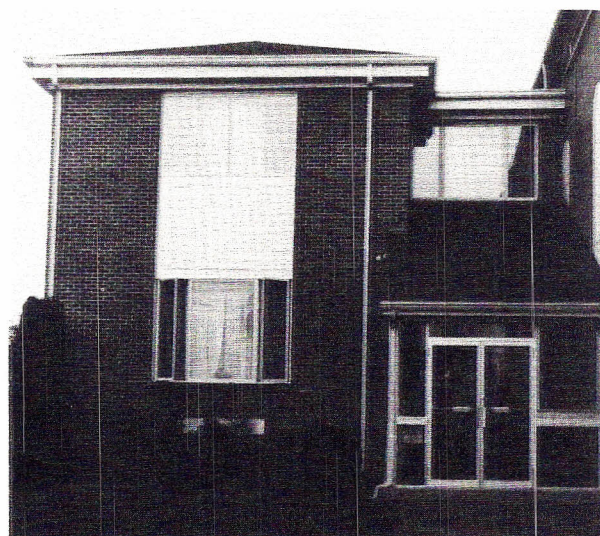
With occasional mending, the slate roof of the church lasted until 1982 when it was considered wise to replace it. Roofers skilled in placing slate on roofs are not easily found in this day of man-made materials, but the chairman of the Property Committee contacted the roofing firm of "Ken and Earl Smith" who secured the necessary materials and skilled workmen. With contributions of individuals and organizations of St. Paul's Church, the roof was replaced for \$33,000.00 without debt.

The Consistories of St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Kutztown, continued the tradition of our founding members in the maintenance, restoration, and improvement of church-owned properties.

Improvements are constant and never-ending. The Lizzie O. Smith house and land were purchased for \$4,000.00 in 1960. The lot on the opposite side of Lambert Alley, at the rear of the church, was purchased in 1961. These properties provided space for expansion of the building and for parking areas.

The Board of Christian Education was organized in 1961 to facilitate the work of the Sunday Church School. Historically the work of the Sunday Church School was coordinated by a superintendent who formed the work of the teachers into a functioning unit. In keeping with the congregation's inherent respect for education, discussions for improved Church School facilities continued.

Architect Dana Gangewere, Reading, submitted a plan which required the removal of the existing Sunday School annex to make way for a two-story building with useable basement. A fund drive was conducted and pledges of \$180,838.00 were made. Money on hand plus mortgages from two local banks made it possible to construct the building for \$289,000.00. The cornerstone for the Church School Building was placed on July 27, 1969, and the building was dedicated on November 30, 1969. Total cost of the entire project was \$486,412.24. Final payment on the mortgage was made in June, 1983.



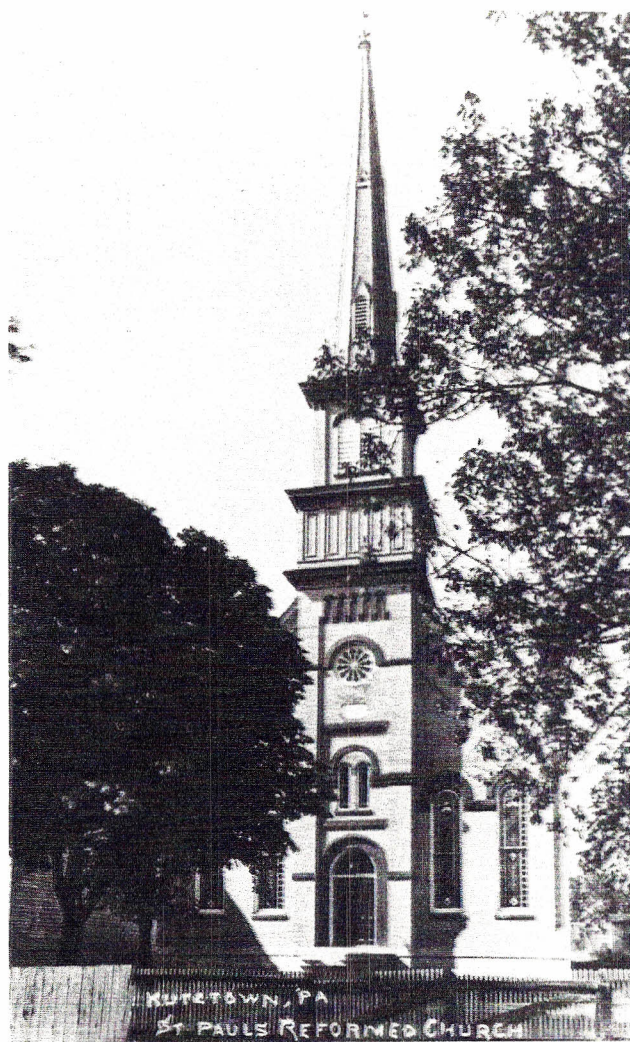
During the construction of our Church School Building and Center, St. John's United Church of Christ, Kutztown, invited our Sunday Church School to meet with them and we did so from May, 1968, to November, 1969.

In conjunction with construction of the Church School Building, the pipe organ was damaged beyond repair. A new three-manual Allen Electronic Organ was installed on the balcony, July, 1969.

Music, a universal language of the emotions, has established the mood of worship throughout history. This was recognized by our Consistory men when they planned on May 12, 1886, for an organist and choir director at the same meeting when they planned to select a pastor.

Our musicians have used tastefully selected and well presented music and have functioned as a Church organization as well. In addition to regular services, members have used their musical talents to present special concerts and sacred cantatas.





Circa 1887

duction of wages on account of short days." As the church was nearing completion, furniture was ordered and installed, seating at 75 cents per foot, the altar for \$45.00, the pulpit for \$85.00, and the railing for \$140.00. A total of \$3,900.00 had been borrowed during construction from individuals, usually members, at 5% interest. By 1892 the Church was not only clear of debt but had \$75.00 in the treasury. It had cost \$8,221.34 to construct and equip.

For the next twenty-eight years this building housed both church services and Sunday School. It was equipped with rows of attached single chairs which, every few rows, contained one chair with a reversible back so that the teacher could face the class.

The church had been in use for three years when Samuel Gehret was employed to fresco the entire interior and to paint figures in the altar niche. The bell, cast in Pittsburgh in 1892, was placed in the steeple and included the names of the 1886 building committee on it.

After ten years the original fresco paintings were replaced by the work of Mr. Kover. At this time the interior of the church was painted "Ohio graystone" in color and trimmed with "Ohio sandstone." The woodwork was white.

On February 11, 1894, the Aid Society and the Sunday School requested the privilege of installing, at their own expense, two stained glass windows to correct complaints

of the Choir and Sunday School classes that uncontrolled light through the windows was very unpleasant and injurious to the eyes. A special meeting was called for further consideration of the stained glass windows for the church and it was unanimously decided to install opal or cathedral style stained glass windows. The Consistory extended the privilege of installing windows to the Sunday School, the Aid Society, the Choir, or any other body or individual. Each window was to be of a quality costing \$30.00 or more and was subject to approval by the Consistory. However, when installed, the cost of each window ranged from \$60.00 to \$70.00 to \$95.00.

The church was frequently overheated. The two coal heaters must have been extremely effective for such a complaint to be made in mid-winter. It was asked that two thermometers be bought so that the deacons could ventilate properly. At another time the Consistory had to cope with the problem of the organ pumping cold air to the discomfort of the Choir.

By the summer of 1894 water was piped into the church at the rate of \$5.00 per year. Not long afterward the church was fully carpeted. The coal oil chandeliers, with their sparkling rows of prisms and their pulley construction which enabled them to be lowered to the floor for replenishment of fuel, gave way to electric lights in 1904. Those two strong heaters were replaced by a vapor heating system about the same time.

The church sanctuary housed both Sunday School and services of worship until August 12, 1902, when a small annex was built on the north rear corner of the church to house the primary department until such time as more extensive construction could be undertaken. Later Professor Henry Sharadin drew a plan for a new structure and the building was completed and dedicated on July 4, 1915.

The church had been in use for over thirty years, a period commonly considered as one generation, when the congregation planned improvements to the church building. The DeLong Furniture Co., Topton, contracted to remodel the interior at a cost of \$15,000.00. It was at this time, about 1916, that the wooden moldings outlining the arches at the front of the sanctuary were added and wall frescoes eliminated. Altar railing, choir stalls, pulpit, and pews were replaced in keeping with other elements of the interior.

Harvest Home 1890

