

Mickleys Church

By Karen L. Gensey-June 17, 1993 M75

St. John's United Church of Christ at Mickleys, gracefully towers above the hectic bustle of traffic on MacArthur Road, making it one of our most prominent landmarks. First known as South Whitehall Church, or Sheldon's Church, it served both Reformed and Lutheran congregations as a union.

Prior to the erection of Mickleys Church, religious services were held in the barn and grist mill on Mickley Road near Helfrich's Spring. The church founders met at Andrew Sheldon's hotel at Mickleys on November 11, 1848, when it was decided to build a church centrally located for the convenience of the community.

By April 1, 1849, enough money was collected through subscriptions. An organizational meeting was held in Butz's schoolhouse, at which time a committee was appointed to create a constitution for both the Reformed and Lutheran congregations.

Serving on this committee were: John Schaadt, Thomas Butz, George Kemmerer, Charles Troxell, Jacob Mickley Jr., Peter Mickley Jr., Peter Miller and David Eberhard. The latter four were also appointed on the building committee. The land on which the church stands was given by David Biery and Daniel Roth. Later, Joseph Biery donated land nearby for carriage sheds.

Work began immediately; and within two months, the cornerstone was laid. The ceremony was held on Whit Sunday, May 27, 1849, Rev. F. W. Mendsen having the honor of placing the stone, assisted by Rev. J. S. Dubbs.

Most of the construction was done by the church members. They were so devoted to their task, that by November, work was finished. Upon completion, the original building cost \$5,494.42 including labor. Dedication services took place on November 17 & 18, 1849, with Rev. J. S. Dubbs and Rev. Jeremiah Schindel in charge.

At first the church was a simple brick structure with plain glass windows and no steeple. Hitching posts were placed along the dirt road, and a white picket fence surrounded the grounds.

The first communion at the new church was held by the Reformed congregation on May 12, 1850 with 64 people participating. The first communion by the Lutheran division took place on October 6, 1850, with 65 people partaking.

Through the efforts of Joseph Gackenbach, a new cabinet organ was purchased. Dedicated on May 21, 1871, it replaced an earlier instrument that had been in use since August 1851.

By 1868, improvements to the original structure were necessary. John Minnich and Edwin Houseman did the carpentry work and outside painting. Anthony Goth, of Bethlehem, did the frescoing. Total costs of these repairs amounted to \$4,789.57. Rededication services were held November 28, 1869.

Further improvements were made to the basement in 1876. An old stone partition wall was removed creating one large room for use by the Sunday School.

When the church was first built, it was heated by an immense wood-burning stove which required several firings during Sunday services. It was replaced with coal stoves, and in 1898 steam heat was installed. In the year of its 50th anniversary, additional repairs were made to the church at a cost of \$3,000. The old benches were replaced with modern pews made in Michigan.

The congregations decided to erect a tower and steeple in 1881. Expenses for the 139-foot steeple totaled \$2,567.63. At the same time, an organist's house was built at a cost of \$790.16. The children of Thomas Butz graciously donated a magnificent 1,800-pound bell, placed in the tower as a memorial. Dedication of the tower and bell was held January 8, 1882.

On Sept. 24, 1882, a handsome, 18-stop pipe organ was dedicated. In honor of its donor, it bore the inscription "to the praise and glory of God, presented by George H. Stem and family to the Reformed and Lutheran congregations of South Whitehall Church 1882."

Work began on an annex in spring 1907, the cornerstone being laid on June 23rd by the Rev. Jacob D. Schindel. This 29- by 60-foot addition was built of cement block manufactured by Long & Mickley. Metal ceilings and eight memorial art glass windows were installed. Two of these windows were moved from the church to the addition. Taking one year to complete, the dedication took place on June 7, 1908.

Fund raising began again in 1917 for painting of the exterior and interior, covering the floor, beautifying the grounds and installing a \$3,000 pipe organ and chimes. Plans were made at that time for a large brick addition which became a reality in 1922.

The Lutheran congregation dissolved its ties to Mickleys Church on July 2, 1964. They relocated further north along MacArthur Road and became known as Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church.

A set of 50 miniature carillonic bronze bells were a gift to the church by Blanche M. Williamson in September 1965 in memory of her husband Frank E. and her parents, Mr. & Mrs. Charles P. King, Sr. The carillon was made by Schulmerich Carillons Inc. of Sellersville.