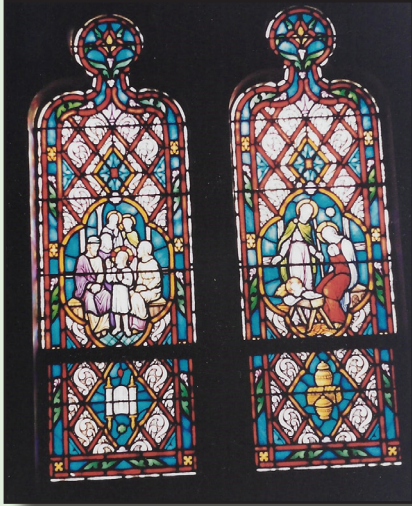




We preserve our local history, promote the history of the Norwin Community and embrace the opportunity to educate the Community about the people, places and events that comprise the history of Irwin, North Irwin, and North Huntingdon Township.

2023 SUMMER NEWSLETTER



The Lutheran congregation is very proud of their church's elegant stained glass windows.



The Brush Creek Salem Church building has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. That designation required strict adherence to restoration guidelines.

Did You Know? Brush Creek Salem Church

(CELEBRATING 250 YEARS)

by Bob Cupp

Driving along Brush Creek Road near Adamsburg in Hempfield Township, it's impossible to miss the historic Brush Creek Cemetery. This non-denominational cemetery, sprawling over many acres of land, has been in use since 1782. It's also easy to notice the Brush Creek Evangelical Lutheran Church just up the road. What isn't so noticeable is the nearby Brush Creek Salem United Church of Christ at the cemetery entrance.



The Brush Creek Cemetery Association was incorporated in 1874 to procure, hold and maintain the grounds previously owned by the Reformed and Lutheran Churches of Brush Creek.

Perhaps it's the bend in the road at that point, or the fact that the building doesn't resemble a traditional, modern church with a steeple and stained glass windows. Whatever the reason, the church seems to be overlooked by travelers as they hurry along this country road. If they only knew what they are missing!

Many people who live in the area aren't aware that the building is an active church. Some have the impression that

The red brick Brush Creek Salem Church was completed in 1820. It may look like a museum, but it remains an active, vibrant church.



(continued from page 1)



The United Church of Christ sanctuary decorated for Easter.



When the windows were replaced for the first time in 1994, the original glass panes were reused. Broken or cracked panes were replaced with the same type of glass used in the original windows, imported from Germany.

it's so old that it must be a museum. Although the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987, the church seems to be a well-kept secret. Even some newer members of the Brush Creek Evangelical Lutheran Church may not realize that the building next-door is a church. Of course, the old-time Lutherans are well aware of that. The congregations of the two churches shared the building for 138 years.

As mostly German settlers moved into the Brush Creek watershed beginning in the late 1760's, they found themselves busy just trying to survive. They were German Reformed and German Lutheran; since they were similar in doctrine, it was natural for them to hold joint religious services. Early services were performed by schoolmasters, serving as preachers. At times, services were held at nearby Fort Walthour in the current vicinity of Kohls. They eventually built a log schoolhouse, which also served as a church.

The school-church was located near where the two Brush Creek Churches now stand. Under constant threat of Indian attack, the building was burned to the ground on June 22, 1782, about three weeks before the burning of Hannastown. Rather than flee, the German settlers decided to stay and rebuild. The second church at Brush Creek, while crude, more closely resembled a church. It stood in the middle of an old graveyard surrounded by fruit trees.



Front view of the Brush Creek Evangelical Lutheran Church at 177 Brush Creek Road, Irwin.

On July 20, 1797, Dr. David Marchand sold 182 acres of land to the German Lutheran and Reformed Congregations for 28 pounds, 12 shillings and 6 pence, which was paid in installments. The deed included conditions that

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would bind these two congregations together for over 160 years. They were two separate entities that would coexist under the same roof. There were to be Trustees elected from each congregation to watch over that joint ownership. The deed also specified that if any attempt was made to sell-off pieces of the land, the entire property would revert back to Dr. Marchand or his heirs.



This 1870 pipe organ is still played occasionally. Donated by the church to the Bushy Run Battlefield Museum, it eventually made its way back to the church and has been meticulously restored, primarily by church members.

The steady influx of settlers, as well as the rapidly growing families, made the necessity of building a larger church inevitable. A constitution was written, giving the yet-to-be-built church an impartial name: “The Brush Creek Salem Church,” along with provisions for sharing the structure. A cornerstone was laid August 17, 1816. Unfortunately, they didn’t have enough money to finish what they started, so they appealed to the Pennsylvania Assembly. It took a legislative act to allow them to sell some of their land in plots to raise sufficient funds. Work progressed until the red brick church was finally completed in 1820. The dedication service was led by Rev. John Michael Steck, the Lutheran minister, and Nicholas Hacke, the Reformed minister.

“Salem” was included in the church name to represent “peace.” “The purpose had been to maintain a holy union between two similar congregations sharing a common goal through a common God.” Donations to the church never seemed to be enough to offset expenses, so to improve and maintain the building, they continued to sell-off the land piece by piece. The Brush Creek Cemetery Association was incorporated in 1874 to procure, hold and maintain certain grounds previously owned by the Reformed and Lutheran Churches of Brush Creek. The only tie to the churches was that the five Reformed and five Lutheran Directors must be members of one of the two churches.

In 1870, the congregation voted to purchase a portable pipe organ for \$900, using funds from the sale of property to the Penn Gas Coal Co. The organ was built by German craftsmen at A. B. Felgemaker Company in Buffalo, New York. The organ case and seat are made of solid walnut. There are 11 decorative pipes, 6 stops and a 5 octave keyboard. There’s also an octave foot pedal. Church members were only aware of two other organs like it remaining in existence. The organ was used continuously by both congregations until the purchase of an electric organ. After a stay at Bushy Run Battlefield Museum and a major restoration, with most of the work done by church members, this beautiful antique can still be played the old fashioned way.



Dedication of the church and the adjoining education/social wing was held on May 25, 1958.

As the saying goes, “nothing stays the same forever.” The Westmoreland County Court of Common Pleas, granted a request for separation, and a deed for 1.8266 acres of the remaining property was deeded to each congregation. Ironically, that’s one 100th of the amount of land originally purchased from Dr. Marchand. On Sunday, December 2, 1956, the old red brick church housed

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a service for another cornerstone laying and in 1958, the Lutheran congregation moved next door. By then, the Reformed Church had been renamed several times, finally becoming the United Church of Christ. That same year, a brick educational building was added to the existing Brush Creek Salem Church structure.

In 2005, I had the privilege of receiving a tour of the Salem Church by three of its members: Lila Mae (Stickel) Misko, whose ancestors attended Brush Creek Salem Church since its founding, proudly led the tour. “This church has meant the world to me,” she explained. “If anyone would like to visit, we’d love to have them here.”



Brush Creek Salem United Church of Christ members Harold Fawcett (left), Lila Mae (Stickel) Misko and Kerry Anthony (right) gave a tour of the charming church sanctuary (2005).

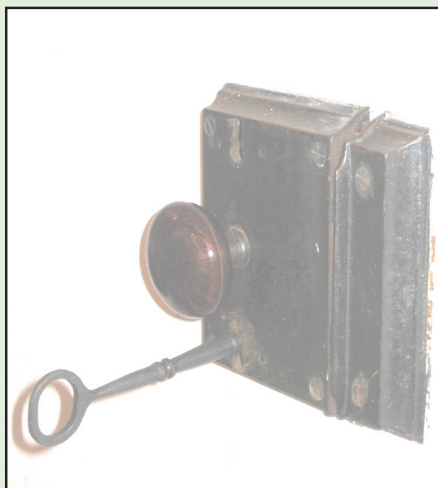


The lovely Lutheran Church sanctuary.

Church member, Harold Fawcett, described his first experience with the church. “In 2002, my wife and I came here for a spaghetti dinner; we had just moved and were looking for a new church. After we saw the beautiful sanctuary and met so many genuinely friendly people, we decided to stay. We’ve been here ever since.”

Kerry Anthony, a life-long church member, expressed his feelings for the church. “We are anxiously in need of new members. There are currently 125 members with approximately 75 active (as of 2005). More than 60% are over age 60. To some of us, it’s been our lives. We’ve been an active congregation for over 220 years. Our hope is that the church can be here to serve for at least another 200 years as an active and vibrant church, and it never becomes a museum or closed for lack of use or disrepair.”

It’s easy to fall in love with Brush Creek Salem Church; all you have to do is enter the sanctuary. It’s like taking a step back in time – when life wasn’t so fast-paced and everyone went to church by horse and buggy. A six-inch long brass key still opens the front door, unlocking the secret that lies within.



This 6-inch long brass key is still used to unlock the United Church of Christ’s front door.

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Once inside, the secret is revealed. The small country church that's watched over the growth of the Brush Creek settlement since 1820 remains a charming country church where old meets new in the 21st century.

2023 is the 250th Anniversary of Westmoreland County, as well as North Huntingdon Township. It's also the 250th Anniversary of the two Brush Creek Churches - Salem United Church of Christ and Evangelical Lutheran Church. These two congregations formed the original Brush Creek Salem Church in 1773.

NOTE:

A series of Anniversary Events are scheduled to be held by the Brush Creek Evangelical Lutheran Church (177 Brush Creek Road, Irwin) in 2023:

** Saturday, June 3
Golf outing at Manor Valley Country Club to benefit Adamsburg Fire Department. This is the church's Anniversary Mission Project.*

** Wednesday, June 14
Strawberry Festival in the downstairs social room, 5:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.*

** Sunday, July 2
Outdoor Worship Service followed by a picnic.*

** Sunday, October 29
Sunday Morning Worship with Bishop Kurt Kusserow.*

** Sunday, October 29
Wrap-Up Banquet at Ferrante's Lakeview beginning at 11:30 a.m.*



In celebration of "Harvest Sunday", the church was decorated with a bountiful supply of home-grown food.



North Huntingdon Twp. Celebrates Its 250th Anniversary

Huntingdon Twp. was formed on April 6, 1773

In 1790 it was divided between North Huntingdon Township and South Huntingdon Township. The following boroughs were formed out of the township:

Irwin, 1864

North Irwin, 1894

Trafford, 1904

Part of Penn Twp., 1855

North Huntingdon officials celebrated the 250th anniversary of the founding of the township on Thursday April 6, 2023 with speeches on history, an Abraham Lincoln portrayer, and a new municipal flag.

According to Carl Huszar, president of the Norwin Historical Society, Huntingdon Township was founded when Westmoreland County was founded 250 years ago on April 6, 1773, at Hanna's Town. North Huntingdon was not formed until 1790, when North, East and South Huntingdon became separate municipalities out of Huntingdon Township. The county was the 11th to be founded in pre-Revolutionary Pennsylvania.

NORWIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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All questions should be directed to our website or to the address below.

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2023 SUMMER NEWSLETTER



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