



A Heritage - - -

St. Gabriel's Church, Douglassville is the oldest church in Berks County and was founded in the year 1720 by the Swedish Lutherans. Services were first held here in 1708 by the Reverend Andrew Sandel. It was one of eight parishes which formed the Diocese of Pennsylvania after the Revolution. It had deputies at the convention which elected Dr. William White to be the first Bishop of Pennsylvania. It helped to form the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

This area in the county of Berks was first known as Morlatton. Whence the name Morlatton was derived we cannot now determine. By some it is said that the first settlers, who were natives of Sweden, brought the name with them from their Native land. Others state the rivalet which flows southward into the Schuylkill known as Jones' Creek was by the Indians called Morlatton, and that from this the settlement was named. The earliest mention in colonial records is in connection with Indian affairs of the period. It is believed by some to be a version or corruption of Manatawny, the Indian name of the creek which rising in Berks County empties into the Schuylkill at Pottstown. Other similarities and referrals to the name of the area were also Manating and Manothanim. But from whatever source derived, it is certain that for about a century the church erected here was known only as St. Gabriel's Morlatton. In later years as noted on old maps the place was called White Horz or White Horse also Warrensburg, from Jacob Warren, an enterprising builder in the village. Finally from George Douglass, an active businessman and large property owner, the place received the name of Douglassville.

As already intimated, Morlatton was a Swedish settlement. A considerable number of their descendants still live in the surrounding country and worship in the old church. The Swedes were a pious people, as is evidenced by the fact that wherever they formed a community they at once made provision for public worship. It is evident that the Swedes loved river lands and made it a point to secure for their plantations or farms a river front, partly because of the advantage thus enjoyed of obtaining an abundance of fish for food and partly for the convenience of

river transportation for their produce, and in a measure perhaps from old associations with their well-watered native land.

Such was the nature of the location which they selected for their homes along the valley of the Schuylkill. Here, too, mindful of the God of their fathers, they built a House to the Honor of His name.

It should here be remarked that after the Swedish settlements in Pennsylvania and the adjoining States of New Jersey and Delaware were made subject to the authority of the English, the Swedish congregations all connected themselves with the Church of England and were served by Episcopal ministers.

Thus this early church established by the Swedes did not formally come into the Lutheran Organization, instead uniting with the Protestant Episcopal Church. The principal reason is that the Church of Sweden in its form of Government has been governed since the Reformation by Apostolic Bishops, as is the Anglican Communion. Also the relations between the Church of England and the Swedish Lutheran Churches in this country had been most cordial and intimate. The ministers preached interchangeably in many of the churches and the same liturgy eventually came to be used in both.

When the Swedes could no longer secure a supply of ministers from their own country, they determined not to keep up a separate organization but enter into full communion and fellowship with the Episcopal Church. This they accordingly did and were thenceforth provided with Episcopal ministers.

Thus the next clergyman in charge of St. Gabriel's Morlatton was the Reverend Doctor Alexander Murray, a missionary of the venerable society "for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts," which society is connected with the Church of England and is the oldest missionary body in the Protestant World.

Dr. Murray's ministry began in 1762 and ended in 1778. During the Revolution, however, his usefulness was much impaired because of his supposed sympathy with the British Government. He then petitioned the Executive Council of the State for permission to retire to Britain during the war, and the peti-

tion having been granted he went home. But after the war he returned here in 1790 and died of the yellow fever about the year 1793.

Dr. Murray's services were of great importance to the Church, as is witnessed by the many entries of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials carefully recorded in the Register.

He brought with him from England a small but valuable library of theological works as a gift from the Propagation Society to the Church for the use of the minister, each book having on the inside cover an engraving of the Society's seal, the device representing a ship drawing near, with the missionary standing at the prow, clad in his robes, with the Holy Bible in his hand, and the natives on shore welcoming his approach.

For some years there was no other English service held within a circuit of eight miles except the meetings of Friends in Exeter and Pottstown.

Hence, English-speaking people from all neighboring places and the surrounding country attended divine service at



The Old Log Church

Morlatton. Worshippers and attendants then came from the townships of Amity, Exeter, Robeson, and Union. With such large material for a congregation, it was to be expected that there should have been as for years there was, a numerous

and increasing attendance as well as large additions to the membership of the church. But during the years the church was several times without a minister, and suffered no little both for want of pastoral service and because of frequent changes in the

pastoral office.

The ancient Swedish church which stood near the east center of the lot was built of logs hewn from the neighboring woods, was built in 1736, and continued in use as a house of prayer for a period of 65 years until 1801 when a new stone edifice, which still stands was erected and is still in use today.



Church 1801-1884 -- Parish House 1884-1959
Restoration as Chapel 1959

Plans are underway by interested friends of the Church and the area to restore this old building to its original state, to be preserved and used as a chapel and for historical purposes.

Both the exterior and interior of this building were of the severely plain style which prevailed in the rural church architecture of the period. It had an arched ceiling, galleries on three sides, reached by stairways converging to the main entrance way; windows above and below the galleries, and high backed pews, furnished with doors, and capped with cornices so arranged as to be about in line with the shoulders of the adult occupant.

The most conspicuous object was the wine glass shaped pulpit, surmounted by a sounding board, from which elevated position the minister could look at close range into the faces of every one of his hearers. At the rear of the very narrow chancel, and immediately below and to the front of the pulpit, was the reading desk. Originally, and for many years, there was no robing room, but later a small apartment, or rather closet, at the side of the stairs leading to the pulpit served that purpose for the accommodations of a single clergyman at a time. The building was heated by stoves, a huge drum overhead, with which they were connected, utilizing the often much needed warmth. The general appearance was quaint and striking, and the casual visitor was always impressed with it. The old log church continued to serve as a school until the winter of 1831-32 when it was destroyed by fire.

During the rectorship of the Reverend John Long a new



church edifice was erected upon ground donated for the purpose by Mr. M. H. Messchert. A large part of the means to build the church was contributed by Mr. John H. Krause of Philadelphia

whose family were members of the parish.

The cornerstone of this edifice was laid October 19, 1881. It was first occupied for worship in January, 1884, and on December 8, 1887, was consecrated to the service of God by the first bishop of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, the late Right Reverend M. A. DeWolfe Howe, D. D.

The latest addition of a new Parish House was completed in September, 1959. This new facility was provided to meet the revitalized growth of the Church and the expanding development



Saint Gabriel's Protestant Episcopal Church - 1959

in the area. This growth in Douglassville represents a great and increasing opportunity for Saint Gabriel's Church to minister to many new people.

Mouns Jones, an early Swede, built the first stone house in 1716 along the Schuylkill River, southeast of our church. The walls of this building still stand but are now falling to ruins. This is the oldest structure in Berks County.



The Mouns Jones House

The township of Amity constituted from the Swede tracts is the earliest settled part of Berks County and was established in 1718 by the Court of Quarter Sessions of Philadelphia County. The name of Amity is said to have been suggested because of the friendly relations which always existed between the Swedes and the Indians. The Swedes had dealt very fairly with the Indians and always purchased from them the lands which they occupied. The Red Men, whose rights they had thus respected, always bore toward them a friendly spirit. While William Penn is to have just credit for purchasing the land from the Indians, it is to be noted that the Swedes had pursued that policy for upwards

of thirty years before a member of the "Society of Friends" was known to have been an inhabitant of Pennsylvania.

Relations between these Indian tribes and the Swedes were indeed very amiable. There is only one mention of hostilities in May of 1728. A small party of Shawanese with an apparently hostile intent hovered in the neighborhood. A number of settlers gathered and sent out a scouting party which attacked the Indians. Shots were exchanged and though little blood was spilled, great excitement and alarm resulted. In retaliation, three friendly Indians were barbarously murdered across the Schuylkill. The Governor, Patrick Gordon, taking the matter in hand visited the area and commissioned John Pauling, Marcus Hulings, and Mordecai Lincoln to preserve the peace. Conferences were held with the Indians at Conestoga and Philadelphia and by means of explanations and presents the Red Men were conciliated. Two notable chiefs of the Delawares were Sassoonan and Opekasset both of whom stopped on the way to and from Philadelphia at Mouns Jones' house at Morlatton.

The White Horse Tavern, built in 1765 by George Douglass a wealthy and influential resident of the neighborhood, and the Black Horse Tavern, erected in 1771, were the landmarks by which the little hamlet was identified. The former was the voting place for Amity and several of the adjacent townships, and the training ground for the militia. During the Revolutionary War it had been the mustering place for the Continental levies from the surrounding region. The arrival twice a week of the stage coach to and from Philadelphia was the event of principal local interest, and the winding of the horn of the postman and the crack of the whip of the driver reassured the publican and his waiting guests that communication with the distant parts of the country was uninterrupted.

The burial ground considerably antedates the erection of the first church. The most ancient tombstone still decipherable is one to the memory of Andrew Robeson, who died February 19, 1719-20, aged 66 years. The footstone had the usual old time designs of the skull, the crossbones and the hourglass, with the inscription "Remember Death." Upon the headstone there is

the following:

**" Removed from noise and care
This silent spot I chose,
When death should end my year
To take a sweet repose.**

**" Here in a peaceful place
My ashes must remain,
My Saviour shall me keep
And raise me up again."**

A significant commentary on the changes of time is that the resting place of the sleeper, then "removed from noise and care," is now within thirty feet of the tracks of the main line of the Reading Railroad. This Andrew Robeson was of Scotch descent and was for many years a Justice of the Peace of Philadelphia County. He held grants of lands on both sides of the Schuylkill in this vicinity, and it was from him or one of his family--the remains of several of whom are interred near his own--that Robeson Township, Berks County, took its name. Another of the more ancient of the tombstones still legible is that of Marcus Hulings, one of the original members of the Swedish congregation at Morlatton, Indian interpreter and man of affairs, who died April 2, 1757, aged 70 years. William Bird, founder of Birdsboro and the iron works, also lays at rest here, as does George Douglass and many other leading and influential persons down through the years to the present time.

In this ground rest the bones of representatives of many races and nationalities. Buried here are some who fought and died for their country from every major conflict and war in the history of our nation. Here are still to be traced upon stones fast crumbling away under the touch of time the names of many who were active figures in the early instances, the graves of entire households, and of those who were the ancestors of many families long since removed from the home of their fathers. For in these sacred precincts lie many who have in this church received holy baptism and the rite of confirmation, and who, when life's course had run to the end, were laid away, amid many

tears, to their final rest. In the procession of the years the very names of many of them, carved upon monumental stone, or erased therefrom by the storms of many seasons, have been forgotten, and none remain to tell who or what they were, or who were their kindred.

“So fades one race of men away,
As into darkness changes day;
Yet other forms forever rise
As day again lights up the skies.
Forever break eternally
Thou ever shifting human sea,—
Birth, Life, and Death thy billows roll
But under God's supreme control.”

Here then may we close the account of times past in the old Morlatton. We are indeed, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses--a long succession of men and women once connected with this church and area, whose names and lives are worthy to be held in perpetual remembrance. Compared with their rugged lot, we are favored with a larger, richer and more abundant heritage. They laid the foundations; it is for us to preserve them and to continue to build.



**Clergy Serving St. Gabriel's Church at Morlatton
Now Douglassville, Berks County, Pa.**

| | | | |
|--|-----------|---|-----------|
| The Rev. Andrew Sandel | | | 1708-1719 |
| Church Founded | | | 1720 |
| The Rev. Samuel Hesselius | | | 1720-1723 |
| Assistnat Pastors of Wicaco | | | 1723-1734 |
| The Rev. Gabriel Falck | | | 1735-1745 |
| First Church Building--a rude log cabin | | | 1736 |
| The Rev. Henry M. Muhlenberg | 1748-1752 | & | 1755-1761 |
| The Rev. John Abraham Lidenius | | | 1752-1755 |
| The Rev. Alexander Murray | 1762-1778 | & | 1790-1793 |
| During the Revolutionary War Period Rev. Murray returned to England. The Parish was cut off from the Church of England so there were no stated public ministrations. | | | |
| The Rev. John Wade | | | 1795-1797 |
| The Rev. Caleb Hopkins | 1798-1801 | & | 1805-1806 |
| The Rev. John Armstrong | | | 1801-1805 |
| The Rev. Levi Bull | 1806-1818 | & | 1819-1825 |
| The Rev. Caleb J. Good | | | 1826-1827 |
| The Rev. George Mintzer | | | 1828-1836 |
| The Rev. William Homman | | | 1837-1838 |
| Various Missionary Clergy | | | 1839-1843 |
| The Rev. Edmund Leaf | | | 1844-1876 |
| The Rev. John Long | | | 1877-1886 |
| The Rev. Edward J. Koons | | | 1886-1888 |
| The Rev. William DuHamel | 1889-1892 | & | 1915-1928 |
| The Rev. Samuel McElwee | | | 1892-1906 |
| The Rev. William R. Holloway | | | 1907-1909 |
| The Rev. A. S. H. Winsor | | | 1912-1914 |
| The Rev. Arthur B. Vossler | | | 1928-1934 |
| The Rev. Daniel C. Osborne | | | 1935-1938 |
| The Rev. Irving Angell McGrew | | | 1939-1942 |
| The Rev. Thomas B. Smythe | | | 1943-1959 |
| The Rev. Woodworth B. Allen, Jr. | | | 1959-1962 |
| The Rev. Lloyd L. Wolf | | | 1962- |

Some of the early clergy serving Saint Gabriel's were missionaries of protestant denominations--others were officially assigned.

