

## The Church Building

The structure in which we presently worship was not our congregation's first attempt at church building. Before the brick architectural gem we now call home was constructed, there was a smaller stone church that provided a hallowed place for the newborn congregation.

Originally worshipping in homes, the congregation began to erect a permanent church in 1734. The location of the church was on land at South Duke Street and Mifflin Street that the congregation had already been using for years as sacred burial ground. However it was not until 1744, well after the completion of the church and after many a soul rested in the churchyard, that James Hamilton formally deeded the two lots occupied by the stone edifice and cemetery to the congregation. That tidied things up from a legal point of view.

The stone structure was described as long and narrow. The Reverend John Casper Stoever served as Pastor and at the dedication of the sturdy new church on October 28, 1738 he prayed, "May God let it attain the desired purpose, so that the Savior may not have cause to lament over Lancaster as over Jerusalem."

We know that the interior had a raised pulpit (seem familiar?) and a sand clock used to aid in the delivery of a one and one-half hour or longer sermon. A stone altar stood before the pulpit and it was surrounded by a walnut railing (seem familiar?). There was a baptismal table located near the front of the sanctuary. There were 53 pews. On the outside a steeple was added and a bell hung therein to call the faithful to worship. On or before 1744 an organ by George Kraft was installed – the first one in the region. The organ must have provided a sense of completeness to those music loving German Lutherans.

Rev. Stoever, who resided in Lebanon, yielded the pulpit in 1744 to Lorenz Nyberg, a clergyman of the Swedish Lutheran Church. Rev. Nyberg proved to be such an eloquent speaker that soon "many members of other denominations regularly frequented the service and the old stone church was soon considerably enlarged to receive the increasing number of admiring hearers."

By 1760, it was apparent that even more space was needed. At a congregational meeting on January 1, 1761 it was resolved "deliberatively, voluntarily and firmly by all the members that their duty to God, by their own religious wants, and those of their children and the honor due to the Savior, imperatively demand that a new church shall be built...." Thus, our current church resulted from a mighty New Year's resolution!

The old stone church that had sheltered the fledgling congregation, housed Lancaster's second parochial school, hosted a session of an important Indian treaty, and attained the desired purpose so that the Savior would not lament over Lancaster, was eventually sold for \$147.22. Recently, an architectural researcher concluded that the handsome stone residence at 130 East Vine Street in Old Town, less than a block from our property, was built from the very stones of our first church building.