

Union Reformed and Lutheran Church
Rapwallonen, Pennsylvania.

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DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Ralph W. Lear, District Officer
311-312 Dime Bank Building
Wilkes-Barre, Penna.

UNION REFORMED AND LUTHERAN CHURCH
WAPWALLOPEN, PENNSYLVANIA

Custodian

This Church is in the custody of a committee, composed of former members of the congregation.

Date of Erection

1833

Present Condition

Poor. Almost completely in the original condition, but is not being preserved.

Number of Stories

One floor and a balcony.

Materials of Construction

The building is built of wood on stone foundations. Original slate roof. Walls are plastered, covered with wall paper, which is in very poor condition. Floors are of wide, pine boards.

UNION REFORMED AND LUTHERAN CHURCH

Wapwallopen, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

Wapwallopen signifies "the place where the messengers were murdered" and the place is situated on the first tract of land patented in the township, a tract called Campania, being on both sides of the creek, having been granted to Daniel Grant in 1769, and patented by George Campbell in 1773.

This ediface is located on a knoll facing the North Branch Susquehanna and the hills across the river just east of the town of Wapwallopen. It is situated on the sides or slope of the valley, which has a cup like formation with the river at the bottom and the hills and distant mountains on both sides. An excellent view is granted from this site.

When this church was erected in 1833, it was in a sparsely settled community called Hellerstown. It was named after the Heller family. Issiac Heller had four sons and bought much land in the valley and built a mill, hotel, store, and blacksmith shop. The first English school was taught in an old house belonging to Michael Weiss in 1811. The first school house was erected on the site of the church in 1813.

The Reformed Congregation at Conyngham began its history in 1820. In July, 1820, Rev. John N. Zeizer visited this and adjoining townships preaching trial sermons with a view of becoming pastor. He was ordained by the Synod of Reading in September, 1821. The congregation was immediately organized and remained under the pastoral care of Rev. Mr. Zeizer for 19 years. He died in 1839 and was buried in the churchyard where lie nearly all of the early settlers of Conyngham.

To meet the spiritual need of the Community, the Reformed and Lutheran adherents joined in establishing this Church. Previous to that time, both societies had worshipped in the school house. In 1880, there were 115 communicants. The officers of the church were: Joseph Hess and Phillip Weiss, elders; M.J. Harter and A.D. Brader, deacons.

The history of the Lutheran Congregation is identical with that of the Reformed Congregation, except that each had its own minister.

The building is about 30x36, built of wood on stone foundations with the original slate roof. It is almost completely in its original condition and has apparently suffered more from malicious mischief than from the elements. There have been no real alterations nor additions, and only a few of the interior furnishings are comparatively new. The pews for example, are about 60 years old, but are not the original ones.

The weather boarded two-story building is well lighted with many windows on the first floor which are protected with panelled shutters of square pattern. The upstairs windows are not shuttered. There is a balcony on three sides and the front panelling is exquisitely hand carved; the door and window trim is also hand carved.

The pulpit is not original. This is directly in front of the door, and is in the front center of the church on a small platform with four steps leading to it.

The original hand made locks are still on the doors, and there is an interesting Maltese Cross Window over one of the doors on the east side of the Church. The main or west entrance has delicately fluted pilasters and directly over these are some hand-carved symbols of the holy articles used in the Church in the Communion Service. The muntins in the transom are carved from wood and are half-round sections.

Inside the Church, there are 18½ pews on the first floor. There are 3½ on one side; the half pew being there because of the small organ, which is not old and is in the front center of the church. There are four on the other side. The front pews facing the pulpit directly, are the same length, but there are five on one side and six on the other. These pews are extremely hard and stiff, the backs are very high and are made of plain wood, stained brown. There is a rather steep stairway leading to the balcony. In the back part of

the balcony, it is impossible to see the minister in the pulpit, so high are the pews and balcony railing. There is a communion railing around the pulpit.

Outside the church, and close to the church yard, is a burying ground for the church members and local use. Here, the memorials state residents of the Valley have been buried since 1804. There were several epitaphs I particularly liked and I have selected two of the older and more interesting ones. This one is on the tomb of a woman who died at the age of 76 in 1869.

"Look here, my friends, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I,
As I am now, so you must be,
Prepare for death, and follow me."

This, of her husband, who died in 1859, at the age of 69.

"Farewell, my friends, do not weep for me,
I am not dead, but sleeping here,
Until the resurrection day,
Then, with my Jesus, I will stay."

Some of the veterans of the Civil War are buried in this cemetery. Many of the members of the Heller family are buried here, also.

The two congregations each getting their own building in the town proper, has caused the ceasing of use of this building or the need of it. It remains, however, a good example of the architecture of that particular period, and rich in historical association. Among those photographs of the building, reproduced in this book, will be found a very interesting reproduction of the original warrant to the land on which this building is situated. If this old church were to be preserved, it would be, as it is even now in its somewhat delapidated condition, of very great historical value.

Historical information obtained from: "History of Luzerne, Lackawanna, and Wyoming Counties, Pennsylvania, 1786-1880." Original warrant obtained from Mr. Cyrus Weis, Wilkes-Barre,

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Reviewed Aug. 19. 1936, THW