

## THE EARLY ORANGEBURGH CHURCH

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### Lawton Salley

There is much interest in the location and denomination of the first church in Orangeburgh. The location question is easy to answer. We have plans of the village, which locate the church to the northwest corner of Bull and Middleton streets. This is the approximate location of the Salley Archives of the Orangeburg County Historical and Genealogical society. There are also descriptions of the church that state that it was constructed of log and clay and that long after it deteriorated there was an elevation here that represented the remains of the structure.

The denomination of this early church is a little more complicated to explain, since it was not administratively part of any larger religious organization. Reconstructing this requires a review of the Protestant Reformation in Europe.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) is considered the founder of the reformation movement, at least in Germany. Jan Huss (1372-1415) of Bohemia, present day Czech Republic was an earlier but unsuccessful reformer and was burned at the stake for his beliefs.

The beginning of the Reformation is traditionally considered to be All Saints Day, 1517 when Luther posted his 95 Theses on the Wittenburg Church door. There were other reformers in other countries, John Colet in England, Jaques LeFevre in France, Francisco Jimenez de Cisneros in Spain, Juan de Valdes in Naples and Disiderius Erasmus in Rotterdam. Of most importance for our purposes however was Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531). He was a contemporary of Luther and led the Reformation in Switzerland. He and Luther disagreed on one major issue, the elements of the Eucharist. Luther maintained, as the Catholic Church did, that the wine and bread were the literal transubstantiated blood and body of Christ. Zwingli maintained that the elements were symbolic of the blood and body of Christ. This represented the major split from Lutheranism, and was the establishment of churches of the "Reformed Tradition."<sup>i</sup>

John Calvin was a follower of Zwingli and worked initially in Basel, Switzerland and later in Geneva. Bear in mind that Zwingli was in Zurich and Calvin was initially in Basel and remember that most of the original Swiss emigrants to Orangeburg came from the Basel-land between Zurich and Basel.

Let me explain briefly the definition of the term "Reformed Tradition." All of our Protestant Churches are the result of the Protestant Reformation. The term "Reformed Church" is used, however, with a more specific meaning. The major branches of the Reformation are considered to be Lutheranism in Germany, Calvinism (Reformed) in Switzerland, Anabaptist who split from Zwingli over infant baptism, and Anglican in England. From Calvinism evolved the Reformed Churches of many European countries including France (Huguenots), Holland, Switzerland, Bohemia, Scotland (Presbyterian), and many others. Lutheranism spread throughout Germany and north into Scandinavia. In this country, Baptist came from the Anabaptist, while Episcopalian, Methodist and

many others came from the Anglican branch. Presbyterian and Congregationalist came from Calvinism and, Lutheran from Lutheranism.

The first Orangeburgh settlers in 1735 were Swiss, officially solicited by the government of the colony of South Carolina as part of the establishment of the inland townships, in order to begin to populate inland areas with settled farmers who would diversify agriculture and provide a barrier between the coastal areas the Indian nations in the interior. The inland population at that time was a thin scatter of Indian traders and cattle ranchers, who often moved onto suitable lands without benefit of land grants.

Salley, in his history of Orangeburg County, is very firm in his belief that the original settlers were Lutheran.<sup>ii</sup> He bases his belief to a great extent on the fact that they were German-speaking. Later extensive and well-recognized research has shown that they were Swiss-German from Switzerland in the first group during the 1730's. Later immigrants included Germans, after about 1750. Research by Orangeburg German-Swiss Genealogical Society members reported in our First Families biographies had shown that in every case where church of origin has been found, the parishes of origin for the founding Orangeburgh Swiss immigrants were Swiss Reformed (Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche). These included the families Dantzler, Felder, Gartman, Giegelman, Giessendanner, Haigler, Herlong, Hungerpiller, Kranick, Kreuter, Moorer, Rickenbacker, Ruple, Salley, Shuler, Stroman, Sturkey, Tanner, Till, and Eisenhut. Bear in mind that the Palatinate (Rhine Valley) is much closer to Zurich, Basel and Geneva than it is to Wittenberg in Northern Germany. Also we know that Heidelberg, Germany was at one time prominent in the Reformed Church, hence the Heidelberg Confession used by reformed churches today.

The *History of the Lutheran Church in South Carolina* gives extensive information about the early Orangeburg settlement and about its early pastors and recognizes that the early German-speaking ministers in the colony were of the Reformed denomination.<sup>iii</sup> The earliest congregation of the Lutheran Church in South Carolina was St. John's in Charleston, founded in 1755. The first official Lutheran church in the old Orangeburgh District dates to 1778, when German immigrants petitioned to establish "St. Matthew's German Protestant Church in Amelia" near modern Cameron, S.C. The present Lutheran Church in the town of Orangeburg was established in 1855 and there is no known connection with the early church.

The Swiss did not have an ordained minister with them but in 1737 John Ulrich Giessendanner joined the settlement as their minister. He was baptized on January 1, 1660 in the Reformed Church in Lichtensteig, Switzerland. He became swept up in the Pietism movement and became a noted "Illuminist" or inspired oracle. He preached and was run out of towns in both Switzerland and Germany. He was a goldsmith by trade and advertised himself as such in Charleston. On the passage over he had held services on the ship and fellow passengers were impressed with his ability. He was not ordained by any denomination and never maintained that he was. He signed letters as John Giessendanner, goldsmith. Much additional information about the early career of Orangeburgh's first minister, Hans Ulrich Giessendanner, can be found in the extensive research of family researcher Joop Giessendanner.<sup>iv</sup>

Hans Ulrich Giessendanner served the Orangeburg church from 1737 until his death in 1738 and kept a record of deaths, marriages and baptisms. After his death, his nephew, also John Ulrich Giessendanner, went to Charleston to apply for orders to preach from the Anglican Church. According to the Lutheran History he was persuaded by a Major Christian Motte to apply to the Presbyterians instead. He did so and was authorized to preach in German to the Orangeburg Church. He served in that capacity from 1739 to 1749. Motte was from a Huguenot family and was well aware of the shared theology of the Calvinist churches, whether Huguenot, Swiss Reformed or Presbyterian. We will learn later that the Orangeburghers were more interested in having the colonial government pay for the church than they were in a particular theology. It is interesting to note that John Giessendanner was born in 1721 and thus was only 18 when he took over the church in Orangeburg.

The definitive Presbyterian History by Rev. George Howe confirms that Mr. Giessendanner was examined by an Assembly of Presbytery who furnished him with orders to preach. Two years later he petitioned to preach in English and did so to the satisfaction of the English speaking settlers. He was said to be a man of learning and piety and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.<sup>v</sup> In 1749 Rev. John Giessendanner went to England and obtained ordination from the Bishop of London. A letter of introduction from Governor Glenn says, "Though bred a Calvinist, he is.... going to England for Orders." The Anglican Church was at that time the official State Church of South Carolina and was supported by taxes.

The Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Orangeburg dates its history to this 1749 church.<sup>vi</sup> Reverend Giessendanner served until his death in 1761 and was followed later by a second minister, The Rev. Paul Turquand, who served primarily in Amelia (St. Matthews) until the American Revolution. After the Revolution there was much anti-British sentiment. There are no records to show that Church of England services were held although it has been said that people worshipped in their homes. In 1851 the Episcopal Church in Orangeburg was reestablished and admitted to the Diocese of South Carolina. Thus the Church of the Redeemer of Orangeburg is the only present day church in Orangeburg to even claim a connection to the original church.<sup>vii</sup>

The recognized dates of origin of the Orangeburg churches are Methodist 1790; Presbyterian 1835; Episcopal officially 1851, 1750 by tradition; Lutheran 1855' Baptist 1860 and Catholic 1891.<sup>viii</sup>

Perhaps a brief summary of the above is now in order. The first 1735 settlers were Reformed Swiss. They were soon joined by other Swiss and German settlers; some (but not all) of the German settlers were Lutheran. Their first minister was not ordained and the second sought and obtained Presbyterian and later Anglican ordination. There is little, if any, record of organized religious activity from the Revolution until the establishment of the Methodist church in 1790. It was not until mid 19<sup>th</sup> century that the various denominations were successfully and permanently established.

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<sup>i</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1979 ed., Vol. 15, PP 547-562.

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<sup>ii</sup> *The History Orangeburg County South Carolina*, A. S. Salley, Jr. 1898, reprinted 1969, The Reprint Company, Spartanburg.

<sup>iii</sup> *A History of the Lutheran Church in South Carolina*, The S. C. Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, 1971.

<sup>iv</sup> Joop Giesendanner, "The Book of Record, Orangeburgh, SC". <http://www.xs4all.nl/~sail/>.

<sup>v</sup> *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina*, Rev. George Howe, D. D., Duffie and Chapman, Columbia, 1870

<sup>vi</sup> "A Short Bicentennial History of the Church of The Redeemer," Orangeburg, South Carolina, based on a well documented paper by Peggy Dukes, March 10, 1961, unpublished.

<sup>vii</sup> "Orangeburg 1735", by Addie Owen Bennett 1961, unpublished.