

The Killian Family Newsletter

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OUR PAST PRESENT & FUTURE

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Salem Lutheran and Reformed Church

by: William D. Killian

The history of Salem Church begins with a look at the religious beliefs that the German immigrants brought to this country. They were not of one mind because they brought beliefs represented by two denominations, the German Lutheran and the German Reformed. The Lutheran name coming from **Martin Luther** and the Reformed name coming from the Reformation itself, the great movement that gave birth to the rise of the Protestant Church in Europe.

The Germans who came into the Salem Community and into surrounding areas of what is now Lincoln and Catawba Counties were of families from Pennsylvania Germans who had settled earlier in Montgomery, Berks, Lancaster and York counties. Their

miles.' It ran from Philadelphia thro' Lancaster and York to Winchester, thence up the Shenandoah Valley crossing the Fluvanna River at Looney's Ford, thence to Staunton River, and down the River through the Blue Ridge, thence Southward crossing the Dan River below the mouth of Mayo River, thence still Southward near the Moravian settlement (Winston-Salem) to the Yadkin River, just above the mouth of Linnville Creek and about ten miles above the mouth of Reedy Creek."¹

Those persons who came to what is now Catawba and Lincoln Counties crossed the Yadkin Valley. These sturdy Germans settled chiefly the South Fork Valley of Catawba and Lincoln Counties.

A "Union Church" was erected in most of the German settlements in North Carolina because there were two denominations represented. This was done as a practical measure until the individual congregations could become strong enough and have the financial resources to build their own church. Since both groups spoke German, another bond existed between the members of the two congregations.

Thus Salem became a "Union Church" located some five miles north of the present town of Lincolnton on the east side of

the South Fork of the Catawba River. In the same manner Daniels Lutheran and Reformed Church developed on the west side of the South Fork River at about the same distance from Lincolnton. All of the German Union Churches eventually erected separate church facilities with the exception of Salem Church, which remains to this day a "Union Church". When separation did occur among these congregations the new church or churches were usually built on the same or adjoining land. Since 1968 Salem has had the distinction of being the sole surviving

traditional Union Church in North Carolina.

"Now as has been the practice for many years, the congregation of Salem United Church of Christ (Reformed) holds services on the second and fourth Sundays at nine o'clock while the congregation of Salem Lutheran Church gathers each Sunday at eleven o'clock. Members of both churches meet each Sunday for Sunday School at ten o'clock. Expenses and upkeep continue to be shared on respective three-quarters (Lutheran) and one-quarter (United Church of Christ)".²



SALEM CHURCH

SALEM CHURCH

immigration to North Carolina reached full tide about the middle of the eighteenth century.

Colonel **W. L. Saunders** in his *Prefatory Notes* to the *Colonial Records of North Carolina* writes of the route they took from Pennsylvania to North Carolina: "the route these immigrants from Pennsylvania took to reach their future home in NC is plainly laid down in maps of that day. On Jeffrey's Map, a copy of which is in the Congressional Library at Washington City, there is plainly laid down a road called 'the Great Road from the Yadkin Valley thro' Virginia and Pennsylvania to Philadelphia distance 435

The United Church of Christ is a Protestant religious denomination. It was formed in 1957 by the union of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church. We have referred to Salem as the Salem Lutheran and Reformed because that is what it has been known as throughout most of its history, although officially it is the Salem Lutheran and United Church of Christ Church.

It is not clear as to the exact date that Salem Church was organized and services were first held there. However, it is assumed that it was a place of worship by 1792 because in 1792 a schoolmaster by the name of **Antoine Hes** died on Christmas Day and was buried there. His gravestone inscribed in German and bearing the date survives in the cemetery.³ The accepted date for the original organization of the church is 1796. A centennial celebration was held in 1896 and in the *North Carolina Lutheran* published in April 1936 a historical sketch by Dr. **L. L. Lohr** recognizes 1796 as its official beginning date. The earliest existing record according to **Davyd Foard Hood** is a "Minute Book" located in the Lincoln County Public Library in Lincolnton. The Minute Book records happenings beginning in 1810. The Minute Book shows a list of subscribers who pledged money to build a new church. This list is dated August 29, 1814. The three commissioners appointed to oversee the work were: Col. **John Reinhardt**, Capt. **Henry Ramsour**, and Mr. **Joshua Wilson**. Work on this new church was started in 1816 and was completed in 1821.⁴

Occurring simultaneously with the construction of the new church was the conveyance of the church site to trustees of the two congregations: apparently the first church was located on private land. On July 19, 1815 **Jacob Killian** deeded a tract comprising two acres and thirty-two poles to "**John Reinhardt, Henry Ramsour and Joshua Wilson**, Commissioners, for the purpose of encouraging schools and a place for worship." This deed is recorded in the Register of Deeds Office in Lincolnton.⁵ This original tract has been added to twice and there is now a total of 4.3 acres in the church grounds.

J. Yates Killian in the *History of the Killian Family in North Carolina* notes on page seven (¶ NC #34 in the **George W. Killian** copy of the same text) that **Jacob Killian** deeded three acres in 1815 to Salem Church. He also states that the meeting house, school house and burial ground had been there before. **Jacob** was the ancestor of the **Killian** families in the Salem neighborhood.⁶ This **Jacob Killian** was the son of **John Killian**, third son of Pioneer **Andreas Killian**. Thus Salem's church site was a gift of a grandson of our Pioneer ancestor, **Andreas Killian**.

It is also interesting to note that one of **Jacob's** children was **John Killian** (1796-1884) who figured so prominently in the formation of Catawba County in 1842. **John Killian** represented Lincoln County in the North Carolina Legislature and was defeated by **Nathaniel Wilson** who favored dividing Lincoln County, an act that **Killian** opposed. Lincoln County was divided and Catawba County formed in 1842. **Killian** and **Wilson** were members of the same church, Thessalonica Baptist Church (Catawba County), but when **Killian** died in 1884 he was buried in the cemetery at Salem Lutheran and Reformed Church.⁷ This was probably due to the fact that his father **Jacob** gave the land for the church and he had been reared in the Salem Community. **John Killian's** granddaughter **Annie Killian Sigmon** attended the **Killian** Reunion for many years and her husband **Jesse Sigmon**, an attorney in Newton, once served as President of the **Killian** Clan.

On April 15, 1848 a meeting was held which led to the construction of the brick church. At that time **Jacob Killian**, chairman, appointed a committee of five men who were charged

with planning and overseeing the construction of the new brick church. The members of the building committee were: **William McCasland, Jacob Ramsour** (Mill Wright), **David Heedick, John Coulter** and **John Heedick**. The chairman, **Jacob Killian**, was the second son of the donor of the church property, and lived on the old **John Killian** farm at Bollinger's Ford in Catawba County.⁸

The brick church was erected by the Salem Congregation in 1849 and dedicated in 1850 was the second known brick church built in Lincoln County outside of the town of Lincolnton where the town's Presbyterian Congregation had put up a brick church in 1838-1839. Also in 1848 while the Salem members were planning their new church a brick church was being completed by the members of Macpelah Presbyterian Church in eastern Lincoln County.

Salem Church has been served by a long line of Lutheran and Reformed ministers. One of the more outstanding of these was the Reverend **Andrew J. Fox**, a Lutheran minister who served Salem from 1855 until his death in 1884.⁹ The Reverend **Fox** also served the congregations of Grace (Catawba County), Daniels (Lincoln County), Trinity (Lincoln County) and Christ Church in Gaston County. He lived on a farm near Salem Church. At the time of his death on June 10, 1884 he was serving the Grace and Salem Churches. **Davyd Foard Hood** notes that "during **Fox's** long tenure as pastor of Salem Lutheran Church the fortunes of the denomination prospered. Pastor **Fox** is buried in the cemetery at Salem Church.

Salem Church building has undergone several renovations and additions during its existence. One of the more significant of these was in 1914-15 when the church was remodeled in its present Gothic Revival style. At this time a tower was erected, extensive renovation took place and new pews and chancel furnishings were acquired. A white marble plaque was placed in the center of the south facade with dates 1815-1850-1615 inscribed thereon. The dates commemorate the date of the first church building (1815), the first brick church (1850) and the new refurbished sanctuary (1915).

Just as the long tenure and service of the Rev. **A. J. Fox** had a positive and stabilizing effect on the Lutheran congregation at Salem, so did the service of the Rev. **John A. Koons** have on the Reformed Congregation. Rev. **Koons** served the Reformed Congregation from 1919 until 1944 and his pastorate reflects the longest period of stability in the life of the Reformed Church at Salem. The Rev. **Koons** and the Lutheran Minister, the Rev. **Jeff L. Norris**, led the way in the construction of the Sunday School Building.

Another important addition to the church building was accomplished in 1936-37 with the construction of the aforementioned Sunday School additions. This building or addition was dedicated on October 2, 1938.

From 1938 until 1989 very little change in the physical plant of Salem Church was effected. In 1989 the combined congregations of Salem enlarged their church plant by erecting a brick-veneer fellowship hall with adjoining kitchen, lavatories and storage. The building joins the older church building on the east side.

A significant event in the recent history of the Lutheran Congregation at Salem occurred when the Rev. **M. Jack Rhyne**, minister to Salem and St. Luke's Churches since 1967, accepted the call to become the church's first resident full time pastor on May 1, 1976. Over the years membership in the Salem Reformed Congregation has declined but its remaining members have stayed loyal and have held together while the congregation of nearby Daniels and Grace Reformed Churches have ceased to exist. The

Reformed members of Daniels congregation joined the Daniels Lutheran Church. However, the present congregation of Salem United Church of Christ (Reformed) is being served by the Rev. **Vann Grimes** of Lincolnton, a retired minister of the United Church of Christ.

In retrospect, what was the Salem Community like 200 years ago and how have the people and the community changed over the years? The early German immigrants became farmers no matter what their skills or occupations may have been in Germany. As the country developed and people became more numerous, the Germans turned to other livelihoods. They were the familiar occupations of the time: Operating grist mills, running tan yards, operating saw mills, conducting blacksmith shops, manufacturing furniture, making shoes, etc.

They came to this country for many different reasons: to escape religious persecution, to seek new homes, to simply enjoy liberty in a new land; and underlying all these reasons was the desire to acquire a fresh start.

It is also important to note that they were slow to yield their native tongue, especially if they lived in settlements of other Germans. This clinging together caused the Germans to retain some peculiar traits of character such as religious code, social convictions and moral attitudes. They were in an English speaking country and this was to work against the German speaking immigrant in professional and official life. Early county office holders were those persons who had a knowledge of the English language. **John Killian** who represented Lincoln County in the North Carolina Legislature in 1842 as a third generation German was probably one of the early Germans to hold a public office in the Lincoln-Catawba County area.

Davyd Foard Hood in writing of Salem Church and its surrounding community says "historically, its membership has been drawn from a territory which includes both Lincoln County and Catawba County which was formed out of Lincoln in 1842. The broad, open agricultural landscape on which the church stands, long punctuated by frame complexes of farm houses, barns and outbuildings is increasingly marked by suburban development and its companion brick veneer houses."¹⁰

While **Killian** was once a prominent name in the Salem community, few if any **Killians** now reside in the immediate community known as Salem. The Rev. **Rhyme** states that there are no **Killians** on the membership rolls of the Lutheran or Reformed congregations. However, the **Killian** name is still a prominent name in other areas of Lincoln and Catawba Counties and **Killians** are numerous in these areas.

It is very appropriate that the **Andreas Killian** Reunion be held at Salem during the Churches 200th anniversary celebration. **Jacob Killian** gave the original tract of land for the church. The **Killians** figured prominently in the leadership and development of the church during its early history. Numerous **Killians** are buried in the Salem Church Cemetery. A cemetery that remains in a good state of repair and is an excellent resource for those doing genealogical research on the early families of the area.

Salem will celebrate its 200th Anniversary throughout 1996 with at least one special event each month. The celebration will start with a New Years Eve Service and ringing of the bell in the tower. There will be an "Old fashioned Sunday", organ concerts, services using the older hymnals and service books, Homecoming in August, and of course the **KILLIAN REUNION ON THE SECOND SUNDAY IN SEPTEMBER**. September 8th 1996. Mark your calendar.

"As Salem approaches its bicentennial, the character of the church and its community remains much as it has for generations. In 1936 the Rev, **L. L. Lohr** prepared a biographical sketch of Salem Church which was published in the *North Carolina Lutheran* in April of that year. The final paragraph of his essay, penned sixty years ago, remains appropriate as a summation of the church and its place."¹¹

"Salem throughout all its history has been made up of a very substantial class of people. No other country congregation has a finer lot of monuments to the memory of its dead. These monuments tell at a glance of the high standing of those buried there. It never has been and never will be a strong congregation numerically. Its territory is too limited to expect that. Twenty-five years ago some of the less optimistic felt its days were practically numbered. Many rural congregations have this feeling when contemplating the matter of loss and gain. Salem has lost by death, by removal of many of its best families, and by financial reverses some of its strongest supporters. It is still a Union Church, one of the few in the synod, but the two congregations live together harmoniously as they should. The congregation is still bringing forth fruit in old age."¹²

Salem Lutheran and United Church of Christ Congregations commissioned **Davyd Foard Hood** to prepare an application for the purpose of listing Salem in the National Register of Historic Places. The application was submitted in April of 1995. It is a well researched document which contains a detailed description of the church and the cemetery as well as an excellent historical narrative of the "Union Church" from its beginning until the present time.

References

1. Catawba County Historical Association, Inc. Edited by **Charles J. Preslar, Jr.** *A History of Catawba County 1954* pp 38, 39.
2. **Davyd Foard Hood**. Application for National Register of Historic Places – Salem Lutheran Church/Salem United Church of Christ, 1 April 1995, p.20.
- 3, 4 & 5. *Ibid*, p. 14
6. **J. Yates Killian**, *The History of the Killian Family in North Carolina*, 1935, p. 7. (¶ NC #34 in the **George W. Killian** version of the same text.)
7. Catawba County Historical Association, Inc. Edited by **Charles J. Preslar, Jr.** *A History of Catawba County*, 1954, p. 231.
8. **J. Yates Killian**, *The History of the Killian Family in North Carolina*, 1935, p. 7. (¶ NC #s 5 & 28 in the **George W. Killian** version of the same text).
9. United Evangelical Lutheran Synod of NC. *History of the Lutheran Church in North Carolina*, 1953. P. 275.
10. **Davyd Foard Hood**, Application for National Register of Historic Places – Salem Lutheran Church/United Church of Christ, 1 April 1995, p. 1.
- 11, & 12. *Ibid*, p. 20

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**A KILLIAN DESCENDANT IN THE
KOBÉ, JAPAN EARTHQUAKE OF JANUARY 1995**
Abstracted from letters to George W. Killian
from Mary Killian Davis

We read about disasters, or see the news on TV and feel sorry for the people involved. When we learn that our relatives were there we become much more interested. In 1989 there was an earthquake in San Francisco. **Shirley** and I had been there only a few days before, visiting a **Killian** cousin and a nephew. This magnified our interest. Fortunately, neither suffered personal injury. My nephew, **Mark Heshner**, said that in California one learns that a bed is not placed near a window, nor are heavy pictures hung over a bed, there is too much danger from broken glass. My cousin, **Lillian Killian Nelson** had many things in the house tipped over, but no structural damage.

On 17 Jan 1995 at 5:46 am an earthquake of 7.2 magnitude struck in Japan. A review of the extent of the damage is featured in the November 1995 *Readers' Digest*, and in the July 1995 *National Geographic*. My cousin, **Mary Killian Davis** has a son, **Steve Porritt**, who lives, with his family, in Kobe, Japan, which is nearly 400 miles west of Tokyo. The epicenter of the earthquake was about 3 miles away in Osaka Bay. There are several man-made islands in Osaka Bay and **Steve** lives on one, Rokko Island. The following information is extracted from a letter from Steve's mother.

Steve, his wife **Yoko**, and their boys **Calvin**, not quite 5 and **Brian**, only 1½ (at the time of the quake) lived on the top, 36th floor, of an apartment building. The apartment building shook like crazy knocking over just about everything in their apartment. When the shaking stopped the building began swaying back and forth in a wide arc. **Steve** said he had never been so totally scared in his life. He could look out the window and see sky at one point of the arc, and then the ground at the other end of the arc. The drapes hung perpendicular to the wall. **Steve** learned later that this was what the building had been designed to do, but during the swaying he was sure "this was IT". His wife got a gash on her head when a box fell and required a few stitches. Everyone got dressed and went down the 36 flights of stairs, there was no electricity for the elevators, and went to a shelter on the island. **Steve** went back to the apartment and reported that most breakable things broke. Appliances, cabinets etc. fell over. They were at the crowded shelter for three days. They still could not live in the apartment so they went to the home of **Yoko's** parents in Wakayama which was normally less than an hour trip. But with one of the two bridges off the island closed, and the heavy damage everywhere, it took six hours. **Steve** found he could make the trip faster by bike. They returned to the apartment, from time to time to get things, but with no utilities it wasn't livable. Everything they got from the apartment, or water they took there, had to be carried up or down the 36 flights of stairs. The building, being relatively new, was found to be structurally sound, but there were cracks in the walls. The middle and lower floors suffered more damage than the top. It was two months before they could return to live in the apartment.

Some buildings had simply fallen over and there was a lot of rubble all over. Other buildings were ruled unsafe and demolished. This left thousands homeless, and many still are nearly a year later. Much of the rubble has been burned, causing concern about the asbestos fumes and other toxic chemicals in the air which has remained constantly smoky. Cement and other debris has been dumped at a spot in the harbor where another island will be built. Some roads are still unusable including a main elevated expressway which may be out of service for a few years.

Many little businesses are gone. **Calvin** turned 5 in April and **Steve** went looking for presents, no toy stores were left. If a business building survived they are now selling survival supplies and other necessities, not toys. Kobe is functioning now. But far

from normal. Main industries did fairly well. The cargo harbor is repaired and functioning. But much of Kobe that was destroyed will not be rebuilt for years.

After shocks continued for months and some separate earthquakes with a magnitude up to 5. About ten days after the Kobe quake **Steve** called his mother again. Later that evening **Mary's** area of Washington state had its own earthquake, magnitude 5. The house shook for about 30 seconds and there was a rolling or undulating movement of the land.

In March 1980 Mount St. Helens blew up in Washington and **Mary** wrote an interesting letter about experiencing that catastrophe. The reports about Mount St. Helens included **aJohn Killian** and his wife **Christy** as among the missing and presumed dead. **John's** parents are **Ralph** and **Jeanette Killian**. Does anyone know who they are? I am unable to identify them in my files.

In November 1995 Washington has had some serious flooding, you doubtless remember seeing that on the news. **Mary's** "ranch" is in the mountains so she was not personally affected by the floods.

Our **Killian** clan is so widely disbursed that we are apt to have relatives in or near any disaster area. To paraphrase **John Donne** (1573-1631) whose lines inspired **Ernest Hemingway** to write *For Whom the Bell Tolls*: "No man is an island... every man is a... part of the main... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee".

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IF YOU HAVE NOT MADE A CONTRIBUTION TO SUPPORT THIS KILLIAN FAMILY NEWS LETTER YOU ARE RESPECTFULLY REQUESTED TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION AND SEND IT TO: ROBERT L. KILLIAN • 5115 FREEDOM DRIVE • CHARLOTTE, NC 28208.

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***Celebrate the 200th Anniversary of
Salem Church
Attend
The Killian Family Reunion
at Salem Church on
Sunday September 8th 1996***

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