

Stella Ruff

CONTRIBUTIONS

CEDAR CREEK METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH

By Claude C. Leitner

Cedar Creek church is the oldest church with a continuous history in interior South Carolina. Its physical location is due to the fact that it was built while as yet the main highway led to ~~Merrell and Charleston~~—some thirty years before there was a Columbia. That's why it is nearly a mile off the main road today. The constituent church is even older than the neighborhood: it was a formal continuation of the old Saxe Gotha church—which had no legal corporate existence, but was a very real force for righteousness in South Carolina from about 1743 to 1761. Written on the fly-leaf of an old German Bible which used to lie on the desk of the Leitner Meeting House was an early copy of the Augsburg Confession dated 1580, so it can truthfully be told that the tap-root of this church runs quite deep.

But aside from the respect due its antiquity Cedar Creek deserves to live by reason of the agitation for Prohibition which was actively begun there in 1812; by reason of the agitation there in 1817 when Benjamin Wolford, George Leitner and Thomas Rawls were placed upon "a permanent committee looking toward an educated ministry"; by reason of an agitation that helped found a branch of the American Bible Society in 1831; and, by reason of an agitation there which resulted in the record which reads "young Weaver (Waeber) and young Leitner built the first cotton mill in S. C. about 1833."

It will be recalled that prior to 1775 the Episcopal Church was "the established" church in South Carolina—and dissenters had a hard time of it because of that fact. The above mentioned Saxe Gotha church will fairly illustrate this. In Saxe Gotha (Lexington) on the banks of the Saluda dwelt a number of pious German people who formed a congregation which was broken up in disgrace by a so-called trial of "the Waeber heretics." It was alleged that their religious leaders, Waeber, Schmidt and Repsimann, had misappropriated the title of Father, Son and Holy Ghost—and had actually done to death the person representing the devil. We smile at such nonsense; but they actually hanged Waeber for it. When they had taken him to Charleston and as we would say today "railroaded" him through the Court, Jacob Waeber, "imprisoned and ironed" signed a Confession worth going to the Charleston library to see. There is not a German expression in it—and Waeber was as German as sauer kraut. Even the nouns and principal words are not capitalized. The rector of a certain church in Charleston certainly knew how to write a good confes-

sion—even if he was ignorant of German and the Germans. But Schmidt and Repsimann and certain others of these persecuted families moved over Broad River and settled in the Cedar Creek neighborhood—where Schmidt was Smith and Repsimann was Turnipseed—and four or five generations of their descendants have given the lie to the "Waeber Heresy." Unorthodox the Repsimanns et al undertook to meet the needs of their day. But the numerous Nipper, Leitner, Kilgo and Turnipseed preachers which have literally covered South Carolina and Florida are and have been of the same grade of "heretics."

So it came about that in 1762 a form of purchase was made from two Sachems by the names of John-May-the-Fourth and Harry-up-the-Grove and a log building about 16'x30' with a dirt floor was erected here under the pastorate of the Rev. John Nicholas Martin. No one seems to know today what the German name of the church was, but in 1788 it was duly incorporated by the South Carolina legislature as "The German Protestant Church of Appii Forum, Cedar Creek". (Appii Forum meant to the minds of that day 'the jumping off place'; or, 'where we thank God and take courage'—depending upon the viewpoint.) But strict Lutheranism was losing out to the Reformed—and to another strong element in the Church which deserves notice—and for some years Cedar Creek church was known as DuBard's Presbyterian Church on Cedar Creek.

The DuBards, Pulliques (Pollocks), LeFobres (LeFeyres), Levars (Levers), Nates, Denkins and a few others were "Calvinistic Presbyterians" and all hell could not change a one of 'em." Their foreparents had been driven out of France by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They had settled in the Sarre valley at Landau, Zweibruecken and about, where they had been old world neighbors of the Martins, Hamiters, Wenigheims (Willinghams), Leitners et al. Landau means for us a certain type of buggy. "When the grandson of the Rev. John N. Martin died in 1860—at the age of 91—his death was announced in these words, "Alas today, Robert Martin, the best wheelwright in South Carolina is dead"—and 'old Captain Hamiter's reputation as a carriage builder of no mean worth still lives at this moment in the Cedar Creek neighborhood."

Then along came Asbury on his old red horse. He had his saddle bags, one clean shirt and two dollars and thirteen cents. He stayed all night with a man named Bookter six miles above Columbia—and was charged \$1.60 for himself and horse. . . and he said so much about that that old Bookter afterwards rode to Cedar Creek Church every 'Lord's day.' The Bishop writes that there was only one clearing from Bookter's to Ce-

dar Creek Church. . . I think that was a mistake. But he was not mistaken about the sticky, red mud; nor, the roughing of the innumerable tall pines—and the singing of the velvety throated mocking birds (which he said had larger souls than the entire congregation at Cedar Creek church). He certainly saw the millions of dogwood, blossoms, the brilliant, woodbine and the yellow jasmine which was "everywhere." The going was so slow; the road so dark and the way so lonesome that the Bishop thought he must have missed the church. But in that "only clearing" on Nippers branch, he got a boy to pilot him, and that boy was afterwards the first Methodist preacher to go out from Cedar Creek church. . . The official record is that the Bishop preached that day for four hours. As a matter of fact he did not. Tradition says he did preach "a very powerful sermon" and after McConnell, DuBard and Wyrick had been heard at great length the Bishop took another text and exhorted so cogently, pointedly with logic and grace from on high, that when he sat down (fully four hours after he took his first text, no doubt), a tall and saintly looking gentleman with a high forehead and a long beard came slowly and reverently to the altar followed, by wellnigh the entire congregation" and John Levar said "Sir, I doubt not we all wish to serve God and our fellow man in the most acceptable way possible." From that moment Cedar Creek church has been unwaveringly Methodist. . . However the classes or bands under DuBard, McKinstree, Wyrick and Leitner were of such distinct types of faith that they were Hermannists (Arminian) and did not merge fully with the Calvinistic classes until 1817—and neither did the class under McKinstree—Calvinistic too, but Knox. . . A list of the members in society at Cedar Creek church in 1793 was in existence in 1846. . . But it was in German and "so near undecipherable" that so few pages were torn out and the old book used as a record of births and baptisms. . . I doubt not but the following list are among the oldest—if not the very oldest to be found anywhere in interior South Carolina. . . "Methodists in Good Standing." The list of the first 32 names is dated 1817 and the succeeding 26 names added are dated 1819. . . They are given in their exact order as first written. . . Thomas McKinstree class leader, Nathan Center, Sterling C. Williamson, Nicholas Wyrick class leader, Andrew Smith, Mary Smith, Mary Smith Jr, Sarah Pullique, Mary Williamson, Herman Wyrick, Sally Leitner, Wyrick, Katrina Wyrick, Stephen Smith, William DuBard, Catharine DuBard, Lewis Denkins, Elizabeth Denkins, Nancy DuBard, Alexhart Fetner, Daniel Gradick, Mary Gradick, Mary Gradick, Jr, Jacob Harbitt, Jacob Leitner, Mary Leitner, Leitner, George Leitner, Jr, class leader, Elizabeth Turnipseed Leitner, Jane McKinstree, Priscilla Nates, Timothy Reeves, Mary Smith, Sarah Smith, and David Leitner, class lead-

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