

Friedens

Gibsonville

Of the many things key to the formation and development of character of those who grow up the American South, the place of the church as a foundation and a spiritual center holds a prominent place. This paper, written by a member of the Church and one who hold it as an important and sacred institution, proposes to record in objective manner the events of the early years of Friedens Lutheran Church.

The site of Friedens Lutheran Church stands approximately two miles northwest of Gibsonville, North Carolina, not far from the Reedy Fork branch of Haw River. The present-day congregation of Friedens maintains that the date of founding for this church is 1745. However, a problem arises in regard to this date because no existing records from the period in question are available today to substantiate this date. Dr. WT Whitsett, a lifelong member of Friedens and a historical expert on eastern Guilford County favored 1771 as the founding date for the congregation. The deed the congregation has as evidence of its existence is dated 1791. In the first volume of his History of North Carolina, RDW Conner states that there was a congregation on the tributaries of the Haw River as early as 1744.

Thus at least three different dates exist as possible founding dates for the church. No authority can be sure his date is the correct one. Existing records from the period are nonexistent, leaving the matter open for speculation. One possible theory based on RDW Conner's data may offer the best answer to the question of the exact date of Friedens. According to Connor, one congregation at least was present on the Haw River and its tributaries before 1745. Several congregations in the area fit this description: St. Paul's, Low's in Whitsett Community, and Friedens just south of Reedy Fork. This paper proposes the following theory as a possible explanation of those early years.

On page 126, Volume VII of the North Carolina Historical Review a statement from an old letter by a Lutheran minister states: "The German settlement in Guilford County is 28 miles long and 18 miles wide. Many hundreds of families live here close together." By coupling this statement with the excerpt from Conner it is possible to assume that in 1745 German immigrants, some of them Lutheran adherents were living in this area. Perhaps these families came together at infrequent intervals for a common worship service open to all, close or on the site of present day Friedens Church. As these settlers grew more prosperous, it is possible that they devoted time to the construction of individual churches in their own areas and stopped coming to the Friedens site for worship services.

Three facts support this theory. First, it is widely known in Lutheran circles that many early Lutheran settlers worshipped without an ordained Lutheran minister present to conduct services. Dr. Adolphus Nussmann, the first ordained Lutheran minister to North Carolina in an official capacity did not arrive in America until 1773. It is certain that German immigrants of the Lutheran faith were in North Carolina before Dr. Nussman's arrival. Second, while Friedens did not formally organize until 1771, worship services of some kind were held in the area, local tradition maintains. While it is often prudent to discount such tradition in this case the widespread agreement on the date 1745 by members and non-members in the area make it impossible to ignore adherence to this date. Finally, the loose organization of the early services is born out by the presence of

elements other than Lutheran ones participating in them. Groups like the Calvinists and German Reformed as well as Lutherans took part in the early services. Indeed, the State land grant of 1791 is to the “Calvin and Lutheran congregations.” The presence of the Calvin element would explain many of the English surnames appearing on the early Communion rolls. The presence of a German Reformed element is also known, primarily because of a final break which occurred within the Friedens congregation in 1857. In that year, the German Reformed element broke off to form a church of their own which became St. Mark’s German Reformed Church and then St. Mark’s United Church of Christ, located in Elon College several miles east of Gibsonville. In addition, tombstones in the oldest part of Friedens Cemetery are engraved with dates as early as 1750 and other stones which may be older have been worn smooth by time. While the existence of a church as well, the fact that the cemetery existed at such an early date can be taken as a sign of religious activity being conducted in the area. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the congregation mentioned by Connor was the group which eventually became Friedens Lutheran Church.

Many families joined together in the effort required to establish Friedens. Among these families are the Wagoners, Christmans, and Gerringers. But probably the most important and lasting contributions came from the Summers family which immigrated from Germany before 1750 and settled in the Haw Old Fields. Perhaps the first description of this beautiful and rich area of North Carolina comes from an early survey conducted by Colonel Byrd who states: “Between the Eno and Saxapahaw is the upper part of the Cape Fear River...” To this fine farming area came Jacob Summers in 1748 with his wife Margaret. Like many other immigrants, the pair arrived in the New World at Philadelphia and proceeded to travel south along the Wagon Road which led to the piedmont of colonial Carolina. Dr. Whitsett records their journey in the following fashion.

Jacob Summers and Margaret Faust often discussed the matter. Both knew many how had left for America. They heard how hundreds were leaving yearly from Germany, Switzerland, and France for Pennsylvania and other points across the ocean. Home was dear to them, and the Rhine Valley fair to look upon, but they finally decided to turn their faces towards the fairer promises of another land. Early in 1748 in the presence of their gathered families they were married, and after hurried preparation left within a week for America, reaching Philadelphia after a stormy voyage. Here they pause for some week’s undecided as to their location; finally moving on down to the German settlements that were springing up east of the Alleghenies in Pennsylvania. Finding much of the best land and the more favorable locations already taken by earlier settlers they slowly traveled further south until they reached the headwaters of the Haw River in North Carolina. Weeks were spent looking over various locations and finally a choice was made of a permanent home at a spot about three miles west of Haw River and the same distance south of Reedy Fork. Here they located in early spring of the year 1750, and here begins the history of the family in the New World.

Jacob Summers cleared land for a farm and with his wife Margaret, began to build a new home for themselves in North Carolina. The couple had several children born to them. Among these children was Peter Summers, an individual who grew up to be one of the leading citizens in Guilford County. Captain Peter aided the church by helping in the formal organization and construction of the first real church building (Local tradition has it that an earlier structure existed which was built in the North Carolina element of the Continental Militia, and constructed the first brick house in Guilford County in 1785. Dr. Whitsett observed:

Jacob Summers died in 1798, aged 80 years, his wife Margaret Faust Summers, in 1810,

aged 90 years. But down through all the succeeding years his descendants have been found among the workers of Friedens Church. His distinguished son, Capt. Peter Summers won renown himself in the Revolutionary War was ever faithful to his church love. A fine illustration of this is shown on an old church record of Friedens giving the list of those who took communion, and from 1820 to 1832 the name of Capt. Peter Summers usually heads the list of communion service. Capt. Peter Summers took the active lead in the erection of the second church building, a large and rather handsome house substantially built in the best manner of the time of logs. (Here Dr. Whitsett disagrees with standing tradition in stating that the second structure was of logs. It is generally believed that the second structure was a wooden frame building with dimensions of 45x60 feet) That he was a natural leader of men is shown by the fact that entering the Revolutionary War at 18 years old he rose to become captain of his company in the First North Carolina Battalion.

Further evidence of Peter Summers' devotion to his church come from an entry in Pastor JG Arndt's personal record book, which lists the name of Peter Summers as one who received Holy Communion in a service held on Stinking Quarter Creek in 1778. So, the efforts of the Summers family greatly influenced the direction and growth of Friedens Church. Captain Summers evidently was favored with the privilege of meeting George Washington after Washington had been elected first President of the United States. Again from the Whitsett papers, the following statements about Captain Peter Summers reveal: "On Thursday, June 2, 1791, Captain Summers with a band of his neighbors spent the day on the Guilford Battlefield with President George Washington and the then governor of North Carolina. This was during Washington's famous southern tour..." And in Washington's diary covering the period of his southern tour, it is recorded that he did visit the Guilford battleground and meet some of the people who lived in the surrounding countryside. It is not clear whether or not Summers was among those individuals because his name was not specifically mentioned.

Thus Captain Summers brought leadership and popular recognition to himself and to Friedens community by his actions. But Friedens has another place, albeit a small one, in American history besides being the home church to Captain Peter Summers. Dr. Whitsett recorded a dramatic occurrence at the church which took place on March 7, 1781 during the time of the Battle of Guilford courthouse. Local tradition preserved the memory of this incident along with Dr. Whitsett. The following description comes from Dr. Whitsett's papers.

On March 7, 1781 a very striking incident occurred at Friedens Church. General Nathaniel Greene had camped between the Reedy Fork and Troublesome Creek with 1400 men awaiting reinforcements before meeting Lord Cornwallis. To the south a few miles around Clapp's Mill there had been some skirmishes with Tarleton's Legion on March 2nd, and on March 6th, there was quite a hot contest at Whitsell's Mill (later known as Summer's Mill) on the Reedy Fork. Passions were at a fever heat for the forces of Cornwallis were drawing near. Scattered bands of soldiers roamed the countryside, whether belonging to Greene's forces or not we do not know, stopped at the home of a man named Shoemaker who lived near the church. It had been rumored that he was a Tory.

They asked for a drink of water, and were told that water could be gotten by going down to the spring. Shoemaker in cool terms told them that when he wanted water he went for it and troubled no one. Hot words followed, and Shoemaker began to argue the justice of the Tory cause and predict the defeat of the forces engaged against Cornwallis. The soldiers became furious.

Shoemaker was seized, hurried to the church door, and made to stand on the steps. Several soldiers stepped back, took aim, and at a given signal, fired. Shoemaker fell dead and the soldiers turned and left. Later Shoemaker's neighbors buried him the adjoining cemetery. Just a little more than a week later, on March 16th, a kinsman of this same Shoemaker was hanged for

refusing aid to Colonel Arthur Forbis who was shot at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse and lay wounded on the field for more than a day. The Battle of Guilford Courthouse on March 15th proved to be the turning point in the Revolutionary war, and by its results brought the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, October 19, 1781.

While one might argue that Guilford Courthouse was not the prime turning point of the American Revolution, Dr. Whitsett's account sheds light on a little bit of the type of thing that all Friedens members remember and cherish as part of a common tradition. The congregation did not bear the name of Friedens, however. Before the 1857 split with St. Mark's, the church was known as Shoemaker's because John Shoemaker lived and farmed near the church and may have laid claim to owning the land that eventually was granted to the church through the state grant of 1791. Before being known as Shoemaker's, early records such as the aforementioned quote from Pastor Arndt mention Stinking Quarter Creek or Travis Creek which may have been references to Friedens. The incident of March 7, 1781, the accomplishments of Captain Summers, and the date of 1745 offer only highlights in a long and colorful history of one North Carolina Church. There are many other interesting traditions, legends, and stories which abound in Friedens community that are either no longer remembered or like the story of old Summer's Mill being haunted mere tales to frighten a child on a cold winters night. To this writer, Friedens most outstanding contribution to local history is its continued existence as a house of worship for 232 years as well as a place providing community life and guidance. Something special inspired Captain Summers during the Revolution. Something special also inspired Dr. Whitsett in his efforts towards researching the past of Friedens Church. No name exists for the common inspiration that these men shared but if one travels to Friedens Community and sees for himself the beauty of the surrounding countryside, the neatness and fertility of its farms talks to the stout, hardy farmers, and then attends a traditional Lutheran service inside Friedens Church on a Sunday morning, he will know why Captain Summers thought the land was worth fighting for and why Dr. Whitsett preserved some of Friedens memories.

Pastors

1774-1789	Adolph Nussman, Supervisor
1775-1785	J. G. Arends, Visitor
1789-1800	C. E. Bernhardt
1800-1805	Philp Henkel
1805-1810	J. L. Markert
1810-1828	J. Scherer
1828-1829	D. J. Hauer
1830-1852	W. A. Artz
1834-1839	J. Grieson, Asst.
1854-1858	S. Scherer
1859-1864	J. D. Scheck
1865-1866	L. C. Groseclose, Supply
1867-1868	S. Rothrock, Supply
1868-1872	C. H. Bernheim
1873-1876	S. Scherer
1877-1880	W. Kimball

1881-1888	J. L. Buck
1890-1892	C. B. Miller
1893-1895	J. R. Sikes
1895-1900	E. P. Parker
1901-1904	C. A. Brown
1904-1906	G. H. L. Lingle
1906-1909	F. M. Harr
1910-1913	C. J. Sox
1913	W. G. Cobb, Supply
1913-1915	B. S. Dasher
1916-1920	Y. Von A. Riser
1921-1931	G. W. McClanahan
1931-1935	E. H. Hite
1936-1943	John L. Morgan
1943-1951	M. R. Farris
1952-1959	K. J. Beam
1959-1964	Glenn L Barger
1964-1971	Luther R Sloop
1971-1978	Vernon A Frick
1979-1986	D Gene Peeler
1987-1991	G Andreas Armstrong
1992-2001	Richard A Rhoades
2002-2005	Kristina N Johnson
2006-2008	Delmer L Chilton
2009-	William C Zima II