

History

The recorded histories of Catonsville indicate that in the mid 1830's a small settlement of German emigrants became established in an undeveloped forested area beyond the northeastern outskirts of the old Caton Village. This new settlement became known as Germantown generally developed along and near Ingleside Avenue which was then called New Cut Road.

Beginning in 1844, a number of the German families attended religious services at the newly founded St. Timothy's Episcopal Church. Shortly thereafter, they felt the need for a church of their own which would allow them to worship more in accord with their German traditions and Lutheran heritage.

In September of 1845, the Salem Lutheran congregation was organized. The first meeting was held in the house of one Paulus Reich, a frame salt box resident located on Ingleside avenue about a half-mile north of Frederick Turnpike. The Reich house was destroyed by fire in the early 1900's.

Several years later, in 1849, Gustav W. Lurman, a well-to-do Baltimore merchant living in Catonsville, helped the fledging congregation in the writing and registering of the church by-laws and ordinances. He was the first council president and executive secretary. Charles A. Brockman, then an unlicensed minister, himself a German emigre, served as the first pastor. The newly formed Salem congregation applied for acceptance in The Maryland Synod in 1849. In 1851, the Rev. Brockman was ordained and served as pastor until 1855 when he was succeeded by the Rev. George W. Ebeling, PhD.

In November of 1849 the new congregation acquired from Joseph P. Fusting and his wife, a triangular two-acre site fronting on Ingleside Avenue. On the property at the time was a log building. It seems likely this structure was temporarily used for worship during late 1849 and the first six months of 1850. It is indicated this structure was also used as a schoolhouse until a new parish school was built in 1863.

After acquisition of the site, a proper house of worship was contemplated. An ambitious plan believed to have been prepared by Dr. Adalbert J. Volck was discarded in favor of a more simple and affordable one. The accepted sketch for the proposed church was drawn by the stone mason, Johann Moessmeringer. This original sketch, which is now on display in the church, was donated to Historical Old Salem, Inc. in 1988 by Mrs. Ralph Ehlers, the former Doris Kolb. Johann Moessmeringer stayed in her father's house during the construction. The church was erected according to this Moessmeringer drawing.

Work on the Old Salem Church was begun in late 1849 and was completed by June 3rd, 1850. The early church records note that the stonework was done by Johann Moessmeringer, assisted by Friedrich Hahn, Heinrich Schaub and Robert

Dill. The woodwork was done by Casper Kuemet (Kummet) and Johann Kolb, as well as others not named.

The major financing of the building was made possible by contributions, loans or gifts from Gustav W. Lurman, Albert Schumacher and Robert Lehr. In addition, members of the congregation contributed labor and materiel to the construction. The new church was dedicated on Sunday, June 16, 1850. On the next day, the following paragraph appeared in the Baltimore newspaper: "*Dedication: the new German Lutheran Church of Catonsville, Baltimore County, was dedicated yesterday. It is a very nice edifice, of Gothic style, surmounted by a pretty tower. The Rev. Benjamin Kurtz and the Rev. L. Van Bokkelen officiated during the day in German and English languages.*" The German language was used exclusively until 1858 at which time an afternoon service in English was held. The matter of whether German or English was to be spoken was not fully resolved until 1897 when the decision was made to hold English services on the first and third Sundays of each month. The usage of German was discontinued in 1901 with the death of Rev. Ebeling.

A welcome bequest to Historical Old Salem, Inc. in 1991 is an original certificate of confirmation for Wilhelm Pfeifer (William Justice Pfeiffer) issued by Pastor Brockman a week following the dedication of the church. A descendant, Mrs. Martha Yocum Ferris, of Olympia Washington, donated the framed certificate, through Carroll L. Pfeiffer, for display in the church.

Soon after the construction of the new building, the congregation decided to set aside part of the two-acre site for a graveyard in which all members would be entitled to free burial. The burial ground appears to have been started about ten feet south of the church and then to have spread to the south-western boundaries of the property and finally to the north of the church. The northernmost portion of the property was used for a schoolhouse, pastor's residence and other out-buildings. These buildings are no longer standing.

Many of the founders of the church, along with other early Catonsville families, are buried in the church yard. Some of these are:

1784-1868 George Maisel	1796-1863 Johannes Bassler	1799-1869 Michael Dill
1785-1864 G. Wise	1796-1869 Philipp Pielert	1804-1861 Anton Lauman
1786-1864 Charlotte Wehland	1797-1872 Johannes Heidelberg	1808-1865 Justena Ruff
1787-1871 George Heinrich Wehland	1797-1891 Marie Knupling	1808-1865 Lewis Sellman
1794-1876 Herman L. Piel	1799-1863 Wilhelmina L. Dettmar	1809-1866 H. H. Wehland

1794-1880 J. Heinrich Zehner	1799-1867 Jacob Rentz	1809-1874 Paulus Reich
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The congregational minutes record that in the fall of 1850 a parsonage was built on the property to the north of the church. In November of 1853 a 280-pound bell was installed in the belfrey. A stone porch was added to the elevation facing Ingleside Avenue in 1869. The minutes are very skimpy as to the details of these additions.

In 1903, the growing Salem Lutheran congregation moved to the new location in Catonsville, after which the old church was used less and less. Over the years the property deteriorated and was in need of a major renovation.

In 1976, a group of interested Catonsville people organized Historical Old Salem, Inc., the purpose of which was to restore and preserve Old Salem Church and site. Through a 99-year lease the organization accepted the responsibility for the care and custody of the building and grounds.

Fortified with a substantial grant for the Maryland Historical Trust, annual membership contributions, memorials and subsequent grants, the restoration got under way. The work is continuing as funds become available.

Because the up-keep and restoration of Old Salem and the cemetery is on-going, the *OLD SALEM TRUST FUND* was established in 1989.

"to provide and assure a financial means to continue the restoration and preservation of the Old Salem Church and adjoining cemetery grounds into the future."

Contributions may be forwarded to:

***Historical Old Salem, Inc.
P.O. Box 9347
Catonsville, MD 21228***

[Contact Old Historic Salem](#)