

SOUTHERN PA DISTRICT  
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

Miller Meeting House Chapel Relocation Dedication

Service

Camp Eder

Saturday, October 16, 2004, 3:00 PM

Thought for the occasion:

Martin E. Marty tells the story of a young theological student who wanted to skip over the requirement of studying Church History and identity and how one is connected to that history. The student told the professor he was not interested in the past. It did nothing for him nor he for it. It did nothing to inform his work as a modern theologian. He said, “[I] deal with ideas, with abstractions, with logic—not with stories, with the concrete, with events.” The professor was moved and stated, “that’s a very interesting notion. How did you come to be so historyless? Tell me.” The student replied, “...[I] would have to go way back; I would have to tell you who I am and where I came from and all that happened to me along the way.” The student described history quite well, “[I]t explains us. It helps give us identity. It locates us and gives us power. Knowledge of the past, of a particular past, helps teach limits and inspires action.”

Welcome & Introductory Comments ..... Georgia Markey  
Associate District Executive

Hymn No. 210 ..... For Christ & the Church

Invocation Prayer ..... Eric Longwell  
Camp Eder Board Chair

A Look Back Into History .... Associate District Executive

Hymn No. 423 ..... “Christian Let Your Light Shine”

Scripture Hebrews 2: 1-8 ..... Tom Druck  
District Stewards Commission

Homily ..... D. Fred Miller  
Former Moderator of Miller’s Meeting House

Dedication Litany & Prayer ... Associate District Executive

Turning Over of the Keys to Camp Eder .... Richard Kann  
District Stewards Commission  
Steve Frazier, Camp Eder Executive

Hymn No. 393 ..... “My Prayer More Holiness Give Me”

Closing Benediction ..... Eric Longwell  
Camp Eder Board Chair

The realization of a chapel on the grounds of Camp Eder, a ministry of the Southern District of Pennsylvania, Church of the Brethren, is one of the highs in District mission efforts. Sincere thanks and appreciation to those who gave birth and substance to the vision of moving this meeting house to this site, to those who labored many long hours giving their time and talent

to make the vision a reality, and thank you to those who gave of their monetary resources, both small and large, to fund this mission project.

## Litany of Dedication

Minister: To the glory of God, our maker, to the service of Jesus Christ, our example, to His church and to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit,

PEOPLE: We come to rededicate this meeting house chapel.

Minister: For this building for which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, the pillar, and foundation of truth,

PEOPLE: We come to rededicate this meeting house chapel.

Minister: For this piece of history and heritage which took roots in 1855 on the south side of the Blue Mountain, we come to

acknowledge our forefathers' faith and dedication to the Church,

PEOPLE: We rededicate this meeting house chapel.

Minister: For worship in prayer and praise, for preaching of the Word, and for the celebration of the holy sacraments,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this meeting house.

Minister: For the teaching of those who are young and old,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this meeting house.

Minister: For the comfort of those who mourn, for strength to those who are weak, and a light to those who are tempted,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this meeting house .

Minister: For the sanctity of the family, for the purity and guidance of childhood and youth, for the renewal of fellowship, and the building of Christian character,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this meeting house.

Minister: For the unity of the Southern PA District of the Church of the Brethren with its ministry agencies, for hard work, for lessons learned, for grace extended, for peace and for unity in the name of Christ,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this meeting house.

Minister: We dedicate and consecrate this building, to begin anew its mission for Christ and the Church, a dwelling place for God's honor, and a house of prayer for His people, in the name of the Creator, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Prayer in Unison:

Almighty God, whom the heavens cannot contain, but whose will it is to have a house on this hill where Your Spirit dwells, and where people may continually call upon You, be pleased to enter into this house which we consecrate to the honor of Your name. We set this meeting house apart from all common and worldly uses as a temple and sanctuary of Your presence, where we may gather for worship, for prayer, for quiet meditation and fellowship with You, our God; where we may confess our sins, and receive Your forgiveness; where we may study Your Holy Word; where we may dedicate and rededicate our lives, our time, our talents and our treasures to You; where we may gather together as one family, Your family, and where we may experience the presence of Your Spirit lifting our thanksgiving up to You, our God, our Judge, our Redeemer, and our Savior. Descend oh God into this place, into our very beings, through Jesus Christ, our Savior

and Lord.

AMEM

## THE MILLER MEETING HOUSE

The Miller Meeting House as pictured on the cover, once stood in Middlesex Township in Cumberland County. The facility dedicated today was dismantled and reconstructed from its original site along the Sterrett's Gap Road to its present site on the Camp Eder grounds in the year of our Lord 2004. It stood for 149 years at its Cumberland County site and was originally a part of the Lower Cumberland congregation of the Southern District of Pennsylvania, Church of the Brethren.

The Lower Cumberland congregation was originally part of what was known as the German Baptist Church in Cumberland County. As early as the 1730's, settlers were seeking to make permanent settlements in Cumberland County before it officially became a new county (1750). By the early 1760's, a number of German settlers began to search for the fertile lands of the county. Some of these were already German Baptists who had moved from York, Lancaster, Lebanon and Dauphin Counties.

Among the earliest known German settlers in Cumberland County were people bearing the surnames of Brandt, Brindle, Cocklin, Etter and Miller. Records for the congregation indicate that the earliest known Love Feast service was conducted at the home of Martin Brandt (1798) at the time John Adams was serving as the President of the growing nation. Both Adam and Martin Brandt were prosperous and successful farmers who built spacious homes for themselves and their families in Monroe Township. Martin Brandt (1750-1835) migrated, from Hummelstown, Pennsylvania, into Cumberland County and eventually acquired as many as 1,000 acres of land. He and his wife, Barbara (1776-1855), reared a family of six children.

The Lower Cumberland congregation separated from the Upper

Cumberland congregation in 1836, and gradually began to expand its membership by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The congregation stood in the path of many German families who were migrating into the Great Valley of Virginia. Word of the agricultural paradise soon spread so that many individuals east of the Susquehanna River decided to move westward. The Pennsylvania agricultural economy was formed on the industry and thrift of the German people who flowed into the county from Lancaster and Lebanon counties. Gradually many of these families established substantial homes and barns on their land. Some of these people, mindful of the Old Testament Scriptures, spoke of "this goodly land."

The Lower Cumberland congregation had no Meeting Houses of its own, thus worshiped in homes, barns, school houses and union church houses until 1855. As early as 1828, the Annual Conference indicated that the construction of Meeting Houses was a matter for local congregations to decide. By 1841 the brotherhood already had forty-one Meeting Houses. A gathering of delegates at the Annual Meeting, in Huntingdon County Pennsylvania (1855), decided that Meeting Houses were to be constructed "without unnecessary ornaments" and were to be used only for the worship of God. The conference later ruled, several times, that bells on Meeting Houses were not acceptable (1859).

In 1855, the Lower Cumberland congregation constructed two Meeting Houses to minister to its scattered membership. One in Monroe Township, near Allen Pennsylvania, was known as the Baker's Church. The other was built along the Sterrett's Gap Road northeast of Carlisle Pennsylvania, on land that had been granted to the congregation by Joseph Miller (1812-1886), a brother of Elder Moses Miller (1820-1885). Henry and Elizabeth (Klein) Miller were their parents (both tracing their origins to Switzerland); therefore they were the grandsons of the noted farmer-preacher, George Miller (1722-1798) who lived near Elizabethtown Pennsylvania, and who became the first minister of the Big Swatara congregation. The Big Swatara congregation was formed in 1756 out of the White Oak Church of Lancaster County (1736). Joseph Miller was married three times. His first wife, Susannah Kauffman Miller (April 21, 1814 - May 23, 1855) had a son named Henry K. Miller (1849-1924) who was prominent in the region of Huntsdale as a feed dealer, a warehouse owner along the railroad,

and a deacon in the Huntsdale Church of the Brethren. He was also very prominent as an early Trustee of The Brethren Home.

Moses Miller, a descendant of the George Miller family, wrote a brief sketch of the family as he knew it. (*Pg. 512 History of the Church of the Brethren of Eastern Pennsylvania, 1915*). This account indicates that George Miller lived as a farmer and a weaver while he served in the free ministry of the Colonial Church

A number of families of the German Baptist faith migrated into Cumberland County from Eastern Pennsylvania. Like his brother, Moses Miller, who settled on a farm near Mechanicsburg Pennsylvania, Joseph Miller purchased a farm in Middlesex Township close to the North Mountain. In his early years as a young man, Joseph secretly participated in the famous Underground Railroad movement as fleeing slaves from the south were assisted to follow the North Star into Canada and freedom. Popular belief existed that Joseph Miller built a cabin in the mountains for fleeing slaves.

Joseph Miller granted land to the congregation for a cemetery and for the construction of "The Miller Church of the Brethren." The Meeting House was constructed of native stone and measured thirty feet by thirty-five feet. An addition was placed to the front as a vestibule in 1954 and a cornerstone was then set in place. The cemetery at the site became the burial site for Joseph's first wife Susanna Kauffman Miller (1814-1855). His second and third wives, Catherine (1814-1661) and Barbara Mohler Miller (1846- ), are also buried there. Space was reserved in the cemetery for African-American people who attended the Miller Church. Common belief is that these were descendants of some of the fugitive slaves.

The Lower Cumberland congregation experienced moderate growth until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By that time, the membership consisted of two hundred persons. The members were then worshiping and conducting Sunday School at eight sites, including one in Perry County.

Over the decades, the Lower Cumberland congregation suffered the loss of members by migration, and by the formation of a number of new churches including: Huntsdale, Carlisle, Boiling Springs, Newville

and Mechanicsburg. In 1926 the church also lost membership with the rise of the Dunkard Movement. The Dunkard Brethren Church was organized, with a segment of Lower Cumberland persons joining the Dunkard Brethren, leaving Lower Cumberland with a leadership void. This loss left the Lower Cumberland congregation disorganized for a period of time. The District stepped in and reorganized the congregation in September of 1926. Some of the persons applied for readmission to the church indicating they had made a mistake by withdrawing from the Church of the Brethren. The body offered forgiveness and rejoiced to receive the group back into the fellowship.

The Miller's Meeting House and the Mohler's Meeting House (Lower Cumberland Church of the Brethren) alternated holding worship services between the two houses, but with failing attendance and loss of leadership, the congregations closed in 1996. Mohler's Meeting House was purchased by the Dunkard Brethren from Mechanicsburg, while Miller's Meeting House, in a closing business meeting, gave the church property to the Southern Pennsylvania District Church of the Brethren.

An empty building, nature's elements, no water or septic and an adjoining cemetery, with minimal available parking, left the Southern Pennsylvania District Board and Stewards Commission to determine how they would be able to maintain the facility and cemetery which had been placed in their hands for perpetuity. As they struggled to be good stewards of the District's finances, a vision was cast to the District Board and to the Camp Eder Board. What if the District were to dismantle the church building and rebuild it at Camp Eder where it would serve as a chapel? The Camp Eder property had been donated by Rev. A. W. Geigley's whose dream it was to see the tract of land developed into a camp for the training and the nurturing of young people in the Christian way of life. If the Board were to take on the vision of relocating the meeting house to Camp Eder, it would not only fulfill the dream of Rev. Geigley, but would also save the building for its intended purpose - providing a place to learn and worship God. As the Camp Eder Board was doing its own long-range planning, near the bottom of the list of long range plans, after current structures were refurbished and much-needed updating was completed, was the desire to have a chapel on site.

The Southern Pennsylvania District Stewards Commission recommended to the District Board that they solicit volunteer labor, materials, and funds to dismantle the Miller Meeting House and reconstruct it at Camp Eder where it would serve as the Miller Meeting House Chapel, thus fulfilling one of the long-range goals of Camp Eder to have a chapel on site. Upon a majority vote of the District Board, the Stewards Commission shared the vision with the 2003 District Conference delegate body, as an opportunity for the District and Camp Eder to be in partnership, to further the mission of the District, which included the ministry of the Camp and decrease the District's maintenance of an empty building.. Thus through this partnership and with the assistance of dedicated volunteer laborers, and monetary donations, the Miller Meeting House dismantling and reconstruction at the Camp Eder site began in late Spring of 2004.

The Miller Meeting House served as “*God's Meeting House*” for approximately 135 years, then it stood approximately 14 years void of “*God's Word,*” thus it ceased being a true church. Now with the relocation of this building, Southern PA District sisters and brothers are called to take the opportunity to make it “*God's Meeting House*” once again, as the founders intended it to be used for the worship of God.

Thanks and appreciation is extended to the District Board, its Stewards Commission members and to the Camp Eder Board for their foresight and faith in making this chapel a reality. Also appreciation is extended to the Miller Meeting Transplant Committee members (*Charles M. Markey, Chair, Ed Nace, Construction Coordinator, Richard Kann, Melvin Fleming, Tony Hinson, Thomas Druck, Rory Hertzog, Steve Frazier, Camp Eder Executive Director, and Georgia Markey, Southern PA Associate District Executive*) who carried out the mission of the District. The move was not without bumps in the road, and differences of opinion, but today we can look at the Miller Meeting House Chapel and say, “**To God be the Glory!**”

This project could not have happened if it had not been for many volunteer hours and for all the individuals and congregations who contributed financially to this project. “**Thank You.**”

*(Portions of the history shared herein were taken from several of the District's Church of the Brethren history references. With special thanks to Elmer Gleim, District Historian and to Cindy Treger, District Office Administrative Secretary for their efforts in summarizing the historical material shared.)*