

TALES OF THE 1700s AND 1800s

Verbal accounts of 'happenings' in and around Wenrich's Church were passed down through the years until, sometime in the early 1920s, they were written down. Nevin Moyer, local educator and historian and an active member of the church, was the recorder of many of the following tales. The tales that were recorded by Nevin Moyer are provided here in his own words. Other tales were found in church records and transcribed from them.

Sunday boots – muddy boots

I very often heard my mother speaking about an old Mr. Reese coming to the old church [ed., this would have been before 1857] with his Sunday boots under his arms, going up to the winding stairs to the pulpit, taking the boots off he wore to the church, standing them in a corner, putting his nice boots on, and then taking his place in the audience. After the services, the dirty muddy boots would be put on again. I am unable to tell just which one of these fine old Reese men it was that wanted to be especially clean while in God's house. My mother was born in 1842.

a flying machine

In the church's cemetery is a headstone which reads thus: "In the year 1828 George Pletz did dy in September 17 day. His age 20 years 1m 10d". This lad's father was John Pletz, a carpenter. His boys naturally took a liking to his tools. They, George and John Jr., contrived a flying machine which they were sure would fly over the mountain to their Uncle Bickles. On the date above, they tried it by placing it in a tree. Instead of it reaching the Uncles, it came down with a crash. John broke his arm. George broke his neck, and died, the first martyr in the U.S. in aviation. Very likely the father cut the tombstone transcription. [Other histories list George's brother as Christ Pletz.]

distilling alcohol

To be a distiller was no more shameful than to be a miller on up to the days of the Civil War. During those days prohibition ran high, so high that in Wenrich's Church the minister ordered the "glinge sack" (collection bag) passed over Joseph Wenrich's head because he was a distiller. "His money" he said "was tainted money". Joseph Wenrich was the grandfather of J. Joseph Wenrich who was killed at the Gettysburg battle and Amos M. Wenrich who drowned in the Potomac when a member of 46 Reg. Co. D during the Civil War. The family felt doubly bad when the minister slighted them, quit going to Church, and are buried elsewhere.

how the bell was raised

It was spring of 1857. The construction of the new house of worship was at its end and it was time to add the bell to the belfry.

A new 1000 pound bell, cast in Troy, New York, arrived in Harrisburg by train on a flat car. The word-of-mouth story goes, "The Linglestown Road wa nothing but dirt and mud that Spring. It took a six-horse team to pull the wagon and they often got stuck making their way fro Harrisburg. They used large timbers to hoist it from the ground to the roof, which was on a slant, and then ropes and tackle blocks pulled it up into place."

To ring the bell, the sexton climbed up into the attic to activate the clapper with a short rope. Later, a longer rope allowed the bell to be rung from the gallery of the sanctuary.

how to light a pipe

As soon as father Pletz got outside the church after services he would scoop his pipe full of tobacco from out his tobacco bag, place the pipe into his mouth, focus his spectacles with the sun, and soon he had his pipe puffing.

panthers in the area

While John Eisenhower lived in Fishing Creek Valley a panther attacked him, but his cries brought his brother-in-law, George Unger, and another neighbor with pitch forks. They succeeded in killing the large beast, but it had already torn into his stomach. Frederick Hatton, who lived in our town, had a similar experience. He had his intestines torn out, but Mr. Hatton's life was saved by his small dog, and later he had a store in Linglestown.

The wolves, panthers, buffaloes, wild pigeons, etc., were very plentiful in our Colonial days. After sunset the wolves would come out of the wooded hills south of the Adam Brightbill farm and set up a real noise. No youngsters were found away from home after sunset those days. A farmer several miles east of Harrisburg shot seven wolves on one shot. I cannot tell who had such a good shot.

shooting off the Old Year

Isaac Marberger was an old man when Ma was a girl. Ma was born in 1842. New Years eve, he with a group with guns would come around to the homes, recite the appropriate German poem and "Shoot off the Old Year", get their treat, fruit, cakes, wine, etc., and then move on. The children looked forward to this event.

the misfortune of one minister

In July, 1808 the Rev.d. Philip Gloninger became pastor of this congregation. He is said to have been an "able man and a fine speaker." His labors were blessed and the congregation rapidly improved under him. These spoke of him as having been an earnest devoted man of God's faithful in dealing with his Catechismens, warning them against Sin, and urging them most earnestly to give themselves to the Savior. The text of his introductory Serman was Esther 4:16 last clause: "Komme ich um, so komme ich um." ("and if I perish, I perish.") Mother Heckert, who related this fact to the Rev. M. A. Smith, said, "Und ganz gewiss er ist auch umgekommen." ("and with certainty he perished.") It seems that on a certain occasion in going to his appointments, he crossed or attempted to cross the Swatara Creek on the ice. The ice gave way and he and his horse sank into the deep water. But providentially he made his escape. Yet from that day was dated the decease which some time after that terminated his earthly existence.

the woman in the well

Catherine Mumma lived on Lot No. 8 of Linglestown. Joseph Meese heard a distress call one certain Christmas morning and , on investigating, he found this lady, in her efforts to land the drawing well bucket on its bench, her feet slipped on ice and she fell into the well. She was wearing hoop skirts, these caused her to float, and her life was spared.

tales of an Indian princess

She died on August 24, 1939, and she's buried in Wenrich's Cemetery. Known as Mary Greene, Mary Redd, Mary Taylor, White Feather, and Eagle Feather, the stories say that she was an American Native princess, a Sioux from the Dakota territory, taken from the arms of her dead mother, Prairie Flower, after a massacre by the American government. The story continues that her second cousin was Chief Sitting Bull and her uncle was Chief Iron Tail, one of the models for the face on the Indian head nickel. As a youth she was sent to the Carlisle Indian School and after that she never left central Pennsylvania. She was at the school at the same time as the athlete, Jim Thorpe. Her first husband was Charles Alexander Redd. Her second husband was Carl C. Taylor, also known as Running Wolf, an Apache. She was not a member of Wenrich's Church, but her burial was in the cemetery. Her funeral was attended by many Native Americans.

The church archives include more pictures and information.