

## LINING OFF WITH THE VORSINGER

VORSINGER: Derived from the German *Vorsänger*, meaning someone who sings first, a leader of the choir, or a cantor.

Music appears to have been an important part of proceedings at St. Daniel's from the very beginning of the church. However, the role of music, if any, in the early church is difficult to describe. Existing early records do not provide much information about music. We can speculate that the church at its founding, and perhaps many years after, did not have musical instruments such as an organ or piano. These would have been difficult to obtain on the frontier that was the Tulpehocken region (later, western Berks County) at that time. Singing was congregational and most likely would've been *a cappella*. Ministers in many early churches of the 1700s were also the musical leaders.

As congregations matured, talented or willing individuals assumed the duties of leader for hymn singing. Churches often appointed a person for the position, called "Vorsinger" in the German churches. If the congregation had a church school, the schoolmaster performed the duties of Vorsinger. At St. Daniel's, Andrew Fleischer served as the schoolmaster about 1812 and may have served as Vorsinger. The records are not clear, but in 1813, Philip A. Guth supposedly promised to serve as Vorsinger. Available records indicate a succession of Vorsingers at St. Daniel's:

Samuel Saltzer	1824-1831
Johnathan Bertram	1831-1840
Samuel Werner	1840-1866
Benjamin Z. Anderson	1866-1892

Since the Vorsinger was also the schoolmaster, all of these Vorsingers lived in the schoolhouse that was located on church property.

The early church did not have hymnals, so singing was largely done from memory. To assist the congregation and to teach the music, the Vorsingers employed a technique called "lining off." The Vorsinger would sing a line of music and the congregation would repeat it. Even with the aid of an organ (the original organ was purchased in 1862), the tradition of Vorsinger and lining off continued at St. Daniel's until 1892. On June 4, 1892, a motion was made at the quarterly meeting of the consistory to sing hymns without lining off. A motion

to purchase English Hymn Books – the first church hymnals – was also passed at that meeting.

With the demise of the lining off technique, it appears the position of Vorsinger was phased out and the organist eventually assumed the role of music leader. At the time of the purchase of the first organ in April 1862, Samuel Werner was the Vorsinger and Benjamin Blatt and John S. Henry were appointed as his assistants to play the organ. The records seem to indicate that Benjamin Z. Anderson followed Werner as Vorsinger from 1866 until 1892 and may have been the last one. During Anderson's tenure, David Knoll, Reuben T. Landis, John S. Henry, and Anderson were organists. The tradition of schoolmaster also being the organist appears to have continued. Many churches in the Pennsylvania-German localities of the early 20th century referred to the organist as "Schulmeister" (Schoolmaster).

The purchase of the organ undoubtedly led to many changes. The Vorsinger was no longer needed and the organist often directed a choir as well as played the organ. With the changes in the use of hymn books and musical instruments that occurred by 1892, the music program of the church was most markedly changed by the formation of choirs, with a choir at St. Daniel's being well established by the early 1920s. The choirs eventually became the agents for instructing a congregation in singing new music.

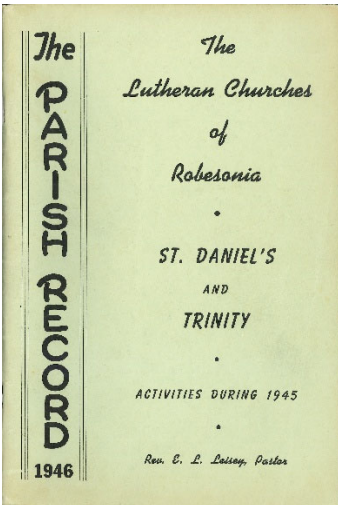
There is lots more to learn about music at St. Daniel's in the coming weeks!

What an amazing and enduring history we share!

Follow this space throughout the year for snippets of St. Daniel's history from 1751 to 2026.

Historical details taken from the 'Saint Daniel's Evangelical Lutheran Church "Eck Kirche" 1751-2001' church history book written by the St. Daniel's History Committee in celebration of the 250th anniversary. More detail regarding this topic is found in Chapter 4 – Ministry – Music at St. Daniel's. Photos from St. Daniel's archives.

**#StDaniels #StDanielsLutheranChurch #EckKirche #CornerChurch  
#OnTheHillOverlookingRobesonia #RobesoniaPA #1751StDaniels2026  
#275thAnniversary #HolyHighlights #History #OurHistory #Vorsinger #LiningOff  
#Music #ALotHappensIn275Years**



On the left:  
Cover of the annual Parish Record from 1946  
(containing the activities during the  
previous year, 1945).

On the right:  
As noted in the 250th  
Anniversary church history  
book, this photo shows Reuben  
T. Landis and "Pappy" Fisher.  
Captioned "'Vorsinger" and  
Pupil' on page 23 of the 1946  
Parish Record, it is unclear why  
this photo was included in a  
report of the 1945 happenings of  
the church if the Vorsingers  
were phased out in the late  
1800s. There is no further  
commentary in the Parish  
Record about it.

THE PARISH RECORD 23

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**ST. DANIEL'S FINANCIAL REPORT**

<p><b>Receipts</b></p> <p>Cash Balance on hand, Jan. 1st, 1945 ..... \$ 960.25</p> <p>Plate Offerings .. \$ 356.00</p> <p>BiPocket Current Expense Envelopes ..... 2,822.11</p> <p>Spec. Communion Current Expense Envelopes ..... 490.75</p> <p>BiPocket Current Expense Envelopes ..... 668.15</p> <p>Initial Envelopes. 40.57</p> <p>Support of Parish Service Program Sponsors ..... 150.50</p> <p>Lutheran World Action ..... 60.60</p> <p>Easter Envelopes Harvest Home Envelopes ..... 49.96</p> <p>Thanksgiving Envelopes ..... 31.55</p> <p>Xmas Envelopes. 31.53</p> <p>Fonds Interest... 62.70</p> <p>Sunday School Share for Sexton ..... 168.00</p> <p>Church Grounds, Sexton House &amp; Amphitheatre Inap. Receipts. 1,768.65</p> <p>Sunday School Donation to same. 500.00</p> <p>Anniversary and Home Coming</p>	<p>Receipts ..... 285.93</p> <p>Miscel. Receipts... 38.29</p> <p style="text-align: right;">7,663.09</p> <p>Grand Total Cash Receipts. \$8,623.34</p> <p>Less Expenses for 1945... 7,346.68</p> <p>Cash Balance on hand, Jan. 1st, 1946 ..... \$1,276.66</p> <p><b>Expenses</b></p> <p>Pastor's Salary ..... \$1,935.00</p> <p>Organist's Salary ..... 240.00</p> <p>Janitor's Salary ..... 280.00</p> <p>Junior Choir Directress, Appreciation Gift ..... 25.00</p> <p>Pastor's Xmas Gift ..... 25.00</p> <p>Weekly Service Program... 190.78</p> <p>Postage, Printing, etc. .... 159.16</p> <p>Heat and Light ..... 296.42</p> <p>Insurance ..... 95.72</p> <p>Music ..... 23.57</p> <p>Repairs ..... 43.69</p> <p>Parsonage Obligations .... 200.00</p> <p>Organ Servicing ..... 24.00</p> <p>Reader's Digest (Service men's Gift) ..... 54.75</p> <p>Amphitheatre, Church Grounds and Sexton House Improvements... 3,204.24</p> <p>Anniversary and Home Coming Program Expenses ..... 327.80</p> <p>Lutheran World Action ... 65.69</p> <p>Miscel. Gen'l Expenses.... 155.86</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$7,346.68</p>
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"VORSINGER" AND PUPIL

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