

HOLY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HILL OVERLOOKING ROBESONIA

HE WAS THE FIRST AND THE FIRST!

Our first Pastor: John Nicholas Kurtz, 1750–1770

He is also considered the first Lutheran minister ordained in America.

St. Daniel's has been blessed with a long line of dedicated pastors (approximately 30 of them), many of whom have given much more service than required and have led the congregation through its 275 years of development. Many stand out as exemplary, such as St. Daniel's first pastor, John Nicholas Kurtz, who served the church during its formative years, the French and Indian War, and events leading to the American Revolution.

John Nicholas Kurtz was the first pastor assigned to the Lutheran Church in Heidelberg, now St. Daniel's Evangelical Lutheran Church, and he was also the first person to be ordained by authority of a Lutheran Synod in what was to become the United States.

John Nicholas Kurtz was born in October 1722 at Luetzenlinden, Principality of Hassuaweilburg, near Frankfurt, Germany. At around the age of 21, he received a call as a "catechet" (evangelical teacher) for the Pennsylvania churches. He arrived in Philadelphia in January 1745. Kurtz was placed at New Hanover, Montgomery County, PA, to teach the congregation school, to instruct the catechumens, and preach at some of the congregations that were then being served by Reverend Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. Muhlenberg decided to send him to the Tulpehocken region of Pennsylvania. Muhlenberg had seen the spiritual strength, devotion, and determination of this young man and felt he was the person to deal with the confusion that then existed among the Lutherans in Conrad Weiser's (Muhlenberg's father-in-law) region. Thus, on December 15, 1746, Kurtz left Rev. Muhlenberg's house to begin a ministry in the Tulpehocken area.

Upon arriving in the Tulpehocken area, Kurtz made his home with Conrad Weiser and his wife, Anna Eve, on their farm in Heidelberg Township. Kurtz was still a "catechet" or licentiate, under the watchful care of Muhlenberg and other pastors who came to the region to confirm members and administer communion at the Tulpehocken churches. At this time, Kurtz had in his charge Christ Lutheran Church at Stouchsburg, Reed's at Stouchsburg, Northkill at Bernville, and Altalaha at Rehrersburg. The Heidelberg Church (now St. Daniels) was added in about 1750. In the short space of about two years of service, at the earnest request of these congregations, Kurtz was ordained. His ordination, the first by the Lutheran Synod in America, took place at Philadelphia on August 25, 1748, at the first meeting of the Pennsylvania Ministerium (Synod).

From December 1746 to April 1770, he faithfully served his congregations in the Tulpehocken and Heidelberg districts. From there he went to York, PA. His work with the Tulpehocken and York churches and his influence were widely known and led to his being unanimously chosen Senior Ministerii to succeed Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg on May 29, 1788 at Reading, PA. Rev. Kurtz filled this position until his death.

At York, he served his churches faithfully during the American Revolution. We can conclude that Rev. Kurtz's work was very much a part of the formative years of both the United States and the Lutheran movement in America. He terminated his tenure at the York church on October 6, 1789, and moved to Baltimore, Maryland. He lived in Baltimore with his son, Rev. John Daniel Kurtz, until his death on May 12, 1794 at the age of 72 and was buried in Baltimore.

It is said that Rev. Kurtz was a learned and practical preacher, conveying Christian principles in a strong resonant voice. He was sometimes called, "a son of thunder." His voice was apparently used to good effect during church services in both word and music. He encouraged church music and was known to have instructed his congregations in singing. He also served as organist and secretary of the congregation to which he was the pastor. Perhaps the love of music and singing, which has been a tradition of St. Daniel's Lutheran Church for 275 years, has its roots in the love of and interest in music expressed by Rev. Kurtz.

Notable events during Rev. Kurtz's ministry at Heidelberg (St. Daniel's):

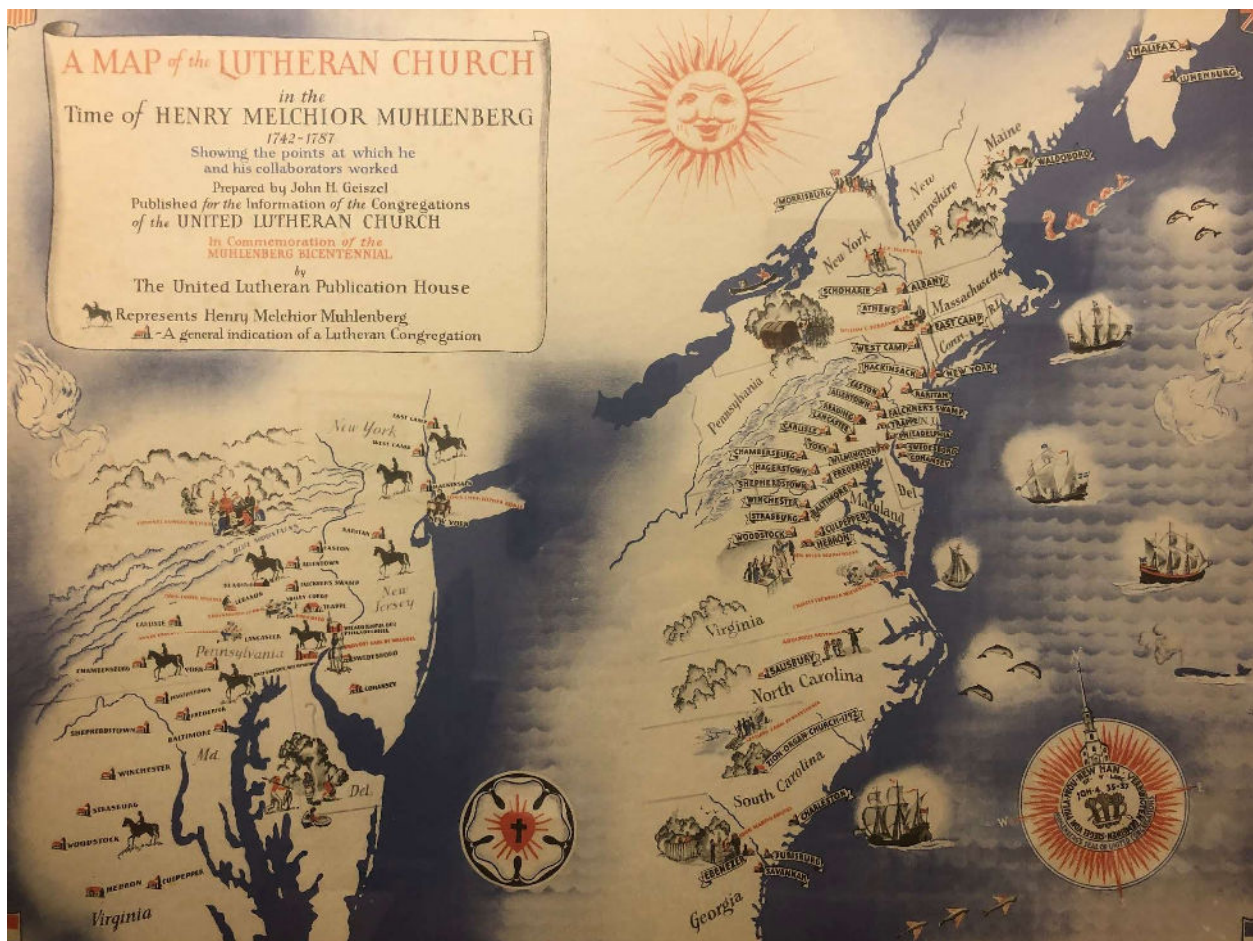
- * The first church building (the "Eck Kirche" or Corner Church) was constructed on land from 3 adjoining tracts owned by Michael Schauer, John Artz, and Abraham Lauck.
- * Berks County was established in March 1752.
- * The French and Indian War began in 1754 (and continued until 1763).
- * The Boston Massacre occurred in March 1770.

What an amazing and enduring history we share!

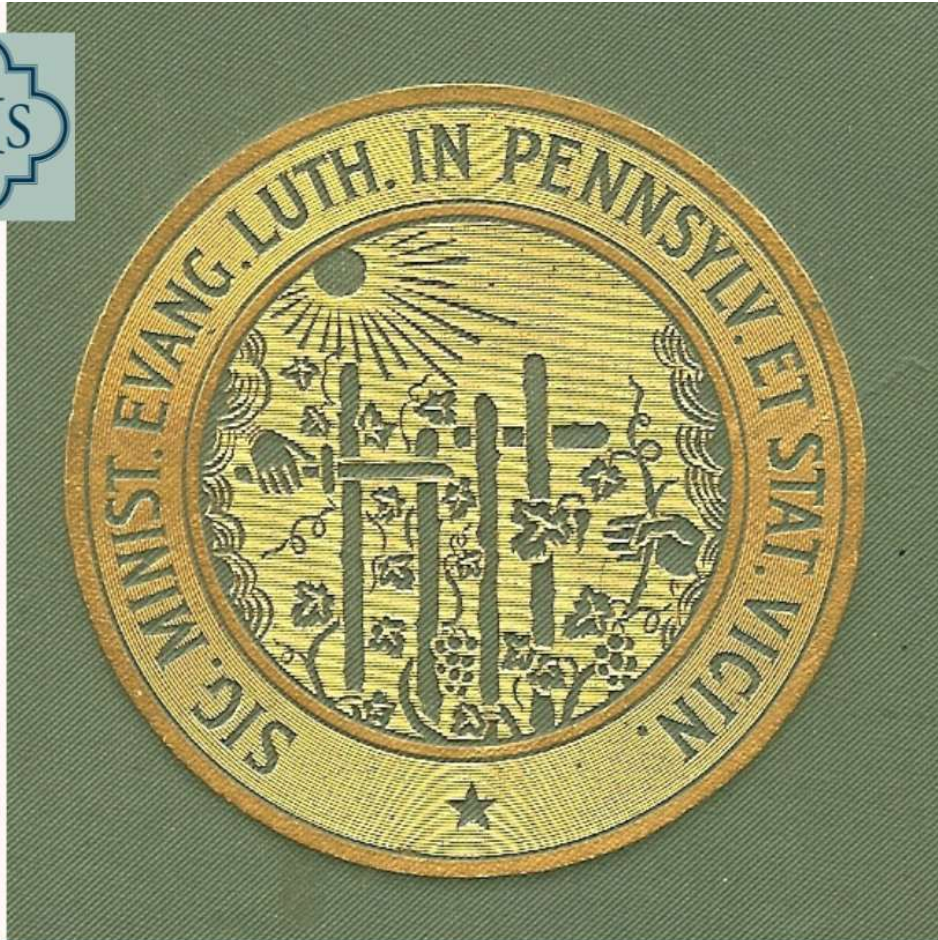
Follow this space throughout the year for snippets of St. Daniel's history from 1751 to 2026.

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 3 - Pastors.

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Source: https://lutheranarchives.blogspot.com/2021/09/lutheranism-and-mop-early-history.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawPWh7BleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETFYMXEzMTMsU3I2bm56eE1Nc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHhvsGvtKX4mGux3qCc_QgAaXSdrlVXZPIEq-uT8QJk1Vdd0sopO8M-l315ll_aem_q7FnFxBq3PshPvQICvaAgA



#ONTHISDAY IN CHURCH HISTORY

On 26 August 1748, the first Lutheran church body in North America, the Pennsylvania Ministerium, was founded by Henry Melchior Mühlberg in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.