

† HOLY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HILL OVERLOOKING ROBESONIA †

READING FAIR STAND – “Kumm esse; eat yourself full!”

Shortly after Rev. Elmer Leisey became the pastor of St. Daniel’s in 1940, high membership in the Sunday School sparked the dream to have a new educational building that could house the entire school. To raise funds for the construction of an educational wing, the church and school cooperated to operate the Reading Fair food stand. The food stand was purchased from Muddy Creek Church on August 27, 1941, for \$750 and St. Daniel’s operated it through 1961. The exception was the years 1943 through 1945 during World War II, when the Fair was canceled and a United States Army depot was located on the grounds. Profits resulting from this venture increased the Building Fund to such a degree that a future building was no longer a dream but became a reality.

Muddy Creek Church owned the original stand at the Reading Fair for 21 years. Funds from the stand were used to pay off their building debt. When their mortgage was finally satisfied, Muddy Creek sold the stand to St. Daniel’s. Edith Spohn was the coordinator of the dining room at the Reading Fair Stand, first for Muddy Creek (her childhood church) and then for St. Daniel’s. According to Edith, “I went to the Fair Stand at 5 AM and made breakfast for the workers, stayed to work all day, came home to deposit the money in the bank. I also did a lot of the buying and took care of much of the transportation. I enjoyed all of it.”

From 1915 until 1978, the Reading Fair was located off N. 11th Street in Muhlenberg Township, near the site of the now former Fairgrounds Square Mall. The Fair typically took place around the 2nd week of September, opening on a Sunday and running through the following weekend. St. Daniel’s food stand was closed on Sundays but operated the rest of the days. The Reading Fair included various amusements and carnival-type acts and a track, first for harness horse racing and later for auto racing. Frank Sinatra performed at the Fair in 1950 and over the years a few other big-name acts included Ray Charles, The Porter Wagoner and Bill Andershow Show, and Pat Boone.

Located near the entrance to the Grandstand, the St. Daniel’s food stand was considered the “official Pennsylvania Dutch stand of the Fair” with dinner specialties that consisted of pork and sauerkraut, ham, beef, turkey, chicken, and vegetable soup. Oysters were served on Fridays. As noted in last week’s Holy Highlight, Rev. Leisey was well known as the “Barker” at the Reading Fair Food Stand, calling in the crowds from the midway to purchase meals prepared by St. Daniel’s members. After Pastor Leisey retired from St. Daniel’s in 1957, Stewart Wenrich took over as the barker.

Some of the committees for the preparation and execution of the food stand were: Planning, transportation, building maintenance, garbage, plumbing, decorating, amplification, purchasing, publicity, donations, cashiers, potatoes (boiling, peeling, mashing, etc.), apple sauce, sauerkraut, pepper cabbage, pies, ice cream, coffee, kitchen, dining room, breakfast and evening shift, night shift. [Imagine needing a committee for various individual food items like pepper cabbage!] There could be 150+ helpers throughout the week, and many St. Daniel's members took a week of vacation to work the stand. Clearly, this was a major endeavor!

Originally constructed from rough lumber and cement block, in 1956, the stand was rebuilt at a cost of over \$2,700 + over \$800 in new equipment, including a new half-bushel potato masher which was hauled to the fair on John Leiss's cattle truck. The lumber for the frame and roof of the new structure came from the farm of Calvin Brown. Hurricane Hazel had uprooted the trees in October 1954, and Brown and others from St. Daniel's cut the trees into the lumber. After the rebuild, the stand had Pennsylvania German motifs next to the sign above the entrance which were hand-painted by member Thomas Alexander.

After the stand was rebuilt in 1956, an article in the September 11, 1956 *Reading Eagle* noted, "The newness of the 'Eck Karrich' structure, the initiative of its pastor, and the spirit of cooperation of all workers, drew us to this beehive of activity." Learning about the Fair and hearing stories from present-day members who worked there, it sounds like it was yet another St. Daniel's activity involving lots of hard work and lots of hearty souls willing to do that work. Though it was a lot of effort, there was also camaraderie, fellowship, and fun.

A few memories shared by members past and present during interviews for St. Daniel's 250th Anniversary in 2001:

Laura Lutz remembered being in charge of the dining room on the late shift, from 2 PM until after the fireworks in the evening. She said that some members roasted meat at home and some peeled potatoes, while some made sauerkraut in the weeks before the fair. Meals cost 50 cents and later increased to 75 cents. Evelyn Yoh noted that workers received a free meal but paid for their dessert. There was a little time after lunch before the supper shift to enjoy the fair. In prepping the stand, the men put down 6 inches of sawdust and "sprayed enough DDT so there would have been no flies for years." Daniel Bechtel said that macadam eventually replaced the saw dust on the floor. There was bone marrow on bread on the menu and oysters were served on Friday. Joseph Bechtel remembered helping his father, Daniel, to spray whitewash on the walls and put sawdust on the floor. He stated that meals cost \$1.50 and went up to \$1.75. [Note: Price differences between Laura's and Joseph's memories may have been due to the different years they were recalling from 1941-

1961.] Linda Eckert Rentschler was a helper at the stand; Irene Brown would take some kids to the fairgrounds after school for that purpose. Bertha Kalbach and Edith Spohn recalled that Raymond Kalbach and Calvin Brown worked hard to put a big refrigerator into the Fair Stand. Prior to the days of refrigeration, food was kept in large cattle troughs filled with ice. The butcher at Furlough's meat market cut the pieces of meat for St. Daniel's and delivered it to the stand; sometimes members had to make extra pickups. Bread came from Maier's Bakery.

Throughout its existence, the Reading Fair Stand was a source of financial support to the congregation. In 1941-1942 the stand was operated by the St. Daniel's Women's Guild and Brotherhood. The first year, the total revenue was \$2,162.67 with expenses of \$1,999.35, resulting in a profit of just \$163.32. Profits increased the next year to \$2,078.89 and war bonds were purchased with \$1,480 of the proceeds. By 1946, as a project of the church, the Fair Stand contributed significantly to the church's finances. That year, total receipts of \$13,685.92 less \$4,187.93 in expenses resulted in a profit of \$9,497.99. *All other* general receipts for the congregation that year totaled \$6,851.53 so the Fair Stand was quite a boon to the bank account! In 1953, the Fair Stand contributed \$6,056.60 to the building fund. This was a considerable sum, considering the Building Fund debt as of January 1, 1954, was \$25,800.

All told, for the 20 years St. Daniel's had the stand (not including the war years 1943-1945), profits totaled approximately \$80,000!! Based on accounting information in the Parish/Church Records from those years, 1948 was the best year for receipts, with a total of \$13,907.38. But 1946 was the best year for profit, with \$9,497.99 made.

Due to pressure from the Ministerium of Pennsylvania to discontinue all commercial ventures of the churches, following the recommendation of the St. Daniel's Finance Committee, the congregation decided at a meeting on January 21, 1962 to sell the stand. It was rented out for a total of \$50 during Fair week in 1962, and, to replace some of the lost funding, "Fairless Fair" envelope donations amounted to \$420.25. The stand was also rented out for \$50 in each of the years 1963 (undocumented renter) and 1964 (to UGI). During the years 1965-1966, Church Council records show some difficulty with resolving the disposition of the stand with Reading Fair officials, which actually resulted in consulting a lawyer regarding the directive that St. Daniel's had to operate the stand or pay rent. In 1966, St. Daniel's was able to remove the contents of the stand, while receiving only a final \$50 rental fee for the building from Lindy Vicari, a stock-car racing promoter and operator of the Reading Fairgrounds from 1955 until 1979. [The name "Lindy Vacaro" was recorded in a few members' 250th Anniversary historical interviews pertaining to the Fair

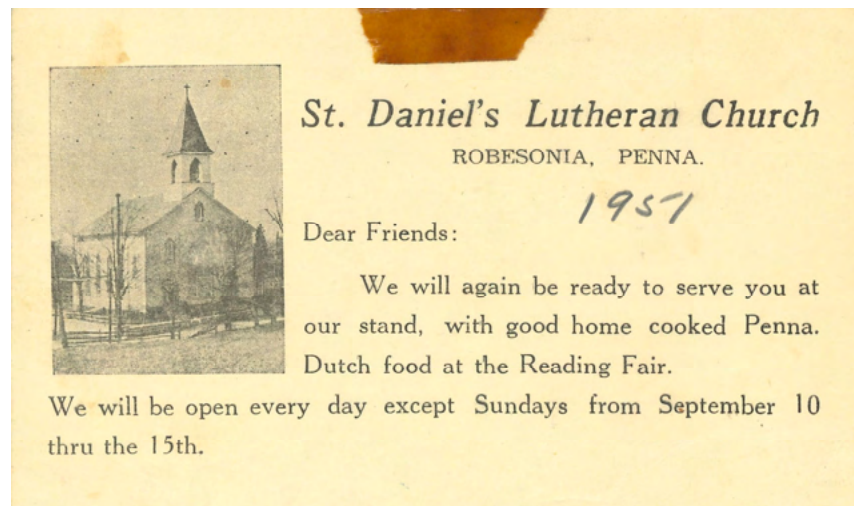
Stand's final disposition, but a Google search suggests the correct spelling was Lindy Vicari.] Seems a bittersweet ending for such a remarkable venture...

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 'St. 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 details regarding this topic are found in Chapter 3 – Pastors – Elmer Lebo Leisey, 1940-1957; Chapter 4 – Ministry – Sunday School and Christian Education; Chapter 7 – The Organizational Church – Secretaries/Administrative Assistants; Chapter 7 – The Organizational Church – Church Finances. Additional details from member interviews for the 250th anniversary, as well as Parish Records, Church Records, and Church Council minutes from the applicable years. Additional Reading Fair history gathered from GoReadingBerks.com. Photos from St. Daniel's archives.

**#StDaniels #StDanielsLutheranChurch #EckKirche #CornerChurch
#OnTheHillOverlookingRobesonia #RobesoniaPA #1751StDaniels2026
#275thAnniversary #HolyHighlights #History #OurHistory #ReadingFair
#ReadingFairFoodStand #PennsylvaniaDutch #PennsylvaniaGerman
#ReverendElmerLeisey #BuildingFund #ParishRecord #ALotHappensIn275Years**



A postcard from 1951 advertising for the Fair Stand.

1948
Helping to Feed Hungry Hordes at Fairground



Many hours of work are required to prepare meals for the throngs visiting the 1948 Reading Fair. Five members of St. Daniel's (Corner) Lutheran Church, Robesonia, are shown here preparing fresh ham, beef and chicken at one of the many fairground restaurants. Left to right are: Warren Davis, Robesonia; Adam Spohn, Robesonia; Catharine Fox, Berkshire Heights; Mrs. Martin Wolfskill, Robesonia, and Mrs. Milton Fidler, Reading. (Eagle Staff Photo.)

Reading Eagle photo from 1948.

Undated photos of the cleaning crew preparing the stand for Reading Fair week.
(Same photo with Adam and Edith Spohn switching out.)



Front row: Warren Davis, Rev. Leisey, John Bennethum, Calvin Brown, Adam Spohn, Daniel Bechtel,
Jacob Coleman

Back row: Earl Angstadt, Earl Lutz (hidden), Peter Gruber, Leroy Stump, Mrs. Homer Wealand, Verna
Schell, (hidden person), Mrs. Earl Lutz, Margaret Gruber, Beulah Bennethum, Helen Stump

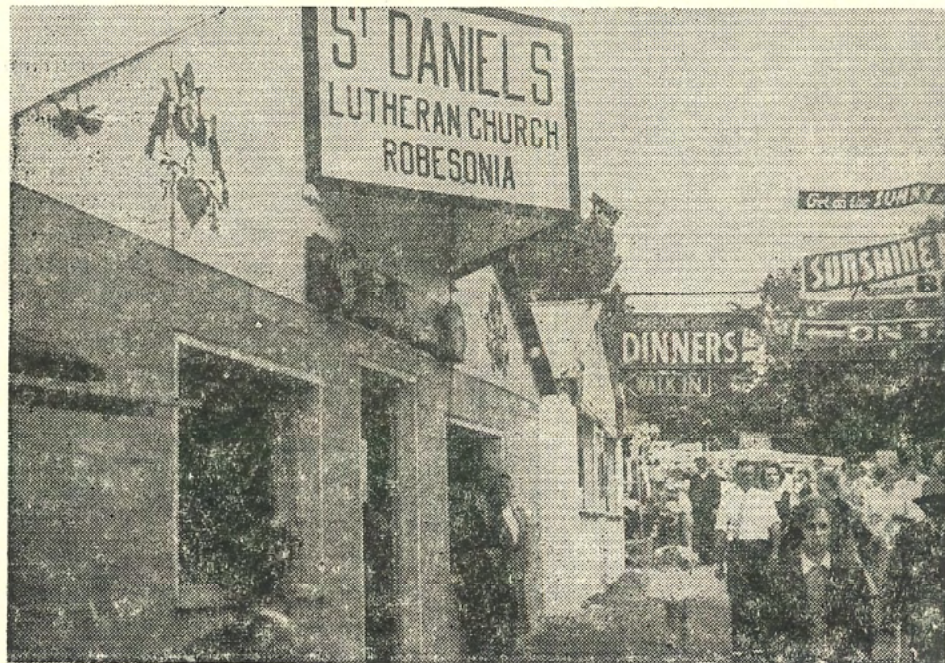


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(hidden person), Mrs. Earl Lutz, Margaret Gruber, Beulah Bennethum, Helen Stump



The food stand after being rebuilt in 1956.



The Most Popular Stand at the Fair

From the 1957 Parish Record.

READING FAIR - 1958	
Fair Receipts	\$ 8,157.43
(Includes Cash Outs, Mdse. Sold, Donations, Tips, Change)	
EXPENSES	
Rental	\$ 525.00
Cigarette Permit	1.00
Cash Paid Outs (Electric Bill, Health Cert., etc.)	61.11
Brown Motor Co. (Keys & Elec. Parts)	3.85
Maier's Bakery (Bread)	82.23
Cacoosing Dairy (Milk & Soft Drinks)	211.26
Capozello Paper Co. (Napkins, Paper Cups, etc.)	108.05
Salsburg Abbattoir (Pork & Beef)	1,225.12
LaManna Bakery (Pies)	273.60
LaManna Bakery (Roasting Turkeys)	15.00
Geo. W. Ulrich (Potatoes)	60.00
Weidner's Poultry Farm (Turkeys)	411.51
Dietrich's Sea Food (Oysters)	61.40
Penn Cigar Sales (Cigars & Cigarettes)	63.90
P. C. Produce Co. (Cabbage, Celery, etc.)	25.00
Brown Motor Co. (Liquid Soap)	4.05
John I. White (Coffee)	33.20
Penn Dairies, Inc. (Ice Cream)	38.16
Furlow's Food Market (Butter & Miscell.)	71.85
Penna. Dept. of Revenue (Sales Tax)	213.59
Rudolph Ensslen Sons (Canned Vegts., etc.)	380.36
United Gas Improvement Co. (Gas)	49.82
Leon L. Nester (Refrigerator Service)	5.50
Wernersville Welding Co. (Coffee Urn Repairs)	14.00
Wm. G. Yeich (Coffee Urn Repairs)	15.00
Change	200.00
Profit for 1958	<u>4,153.56</u>
	\$ 4,003.87
(Waitresses Tips amounted to \$99.63.)	

Information from the 1959 Church Record.

Lutherans Make 174 Gallons Of Sauerkraut for Fair Stand

Robesonia, Aug. 6 — Members of St. Daniel's Lutheran Church met in the church Pavilion and made 174 gallons of sauerkraut for the Reading Fair, where they will conduct an eating stand September 7 to 13. The Rev. and Mrs. E. L. Leisey and the following others prepared the kraut: Mr. and Mrs. Calvin E. Brown. Mrs. John Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Brown, Mrs. Susan Stump, Mrs. Irvin Bricker, Mrs. Mary Weidner, Mrs. Alvin Yoh, Mr. Warren Davis and children, Freddie and Nadine; Mr. and Mrs. John Benne-thum, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Engle, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Yarnell and son, Philip; Mr. Harry Mountz, Kenneth Yoh, Mrs. LeRoy Stump and son, Donald; Jonas Angstadt, Mrs. Nora Boyer, Miss Verna Schell, Howard E. Hoffman and Mrs. Adam F. Spohn Jr., and daughter, Britta.

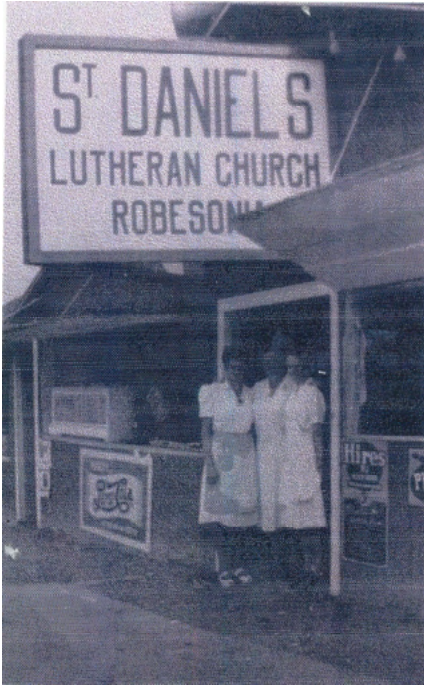
Members and friends of St. Daniel's Senior Choir spent a social evening. Traveling by bus, they went to Mt. Gretna to see the play, "Dough Girls," and later had refreshments. In the party were:

Pastor and Mrs. Leisey, Mr. and Mrs. Calvin E. Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Warren Davis, Mr. and Mrs. Willis Feeg, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Marderness, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Marderness, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Yarnell, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Labe, Mr. and Mrs. Lutz, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Noecker, Mr. and Mrs. Adam F. Spohn Jr., Mrs. Evelyn Stautler, Mrs. Evan Brossman, Misses Verna Schell, Corrinne Eckert, Doris Eckert, Irene Putt, Edith Rahn and Marie Rothermel, Lester Brendle, George Koch, Carl Lutz and William Ravert.

Join Excursion to Hershey

A large delegation of St. Daniel's Sunday School, Calvin E. Brown, superintendent, joined the excursion of all Sunday schools in this district to Hershey Park.

Reading Eagle article (undated).



Unidentified workers at the Fair Stand.



THE SCENE OF INTENSIVE ACTIVITY

Edith Spohn at the Fair Stand.
Photo from the 1947 Parish Record.

Getting Ready for the Fair

1960



George W. Ulrich, on the truck, and his son Harold, both of whom work on the family's Robesonia potato farm, unload 3,000 pounds of spuds at the Reading Fair food stand operated by St. Daniel's Lutheran Church, Robesonia. Both men are members of the church. This was one of many similar scenes today at the Fairground as tomorrow's fair opening drew near. (Eagle Staff Photo)

Reading Eagle photo from 1960.



Pastor turned carnival barker for "fair purposes" is the Rev. E. L. Leisey, of St. Daniel's Lutheran Church, Robesonia.

Rev. Leisey acting as the carnival barker for St. Daniel's food stand at the Reading Fair.

Reading Eagle article,
September 11, 1956

SCHOLLA GOES TO THE FAIR *Sept 11, 1956*

Church Teamwork Provides Meals For Throngs of Hungry Fairgoers

By SCHOLLA
Arthur D. Graeff

George Ulrich, a farmer from South Mountain, drove his 10-ton truck to the St. Daniel's food emporium at the Reading Fair. It was filled to the gunwales with potatoes. Soon the oblong tubers cascaded over the tailboard into a bin. The mechanical potato peeler, manned by skilled hands, got busy.

After boiling in huge kettles the potatoes were mashed in the new half-bushel masher which forms a part of the new equipment of the Robesonia (Eck) Church at the Reading Fairgrounds.

Now operations were under way to feed thousands of the hungry who will attend the Reading Fair this week.

The two Sundays of fair week are "sans" The Corner (St. Daniel's) of Robesonia. The good people, who volunteer their services, reserve the Sabbath for worship. The hungry must search elsewhere Sunday for pork and sauerkraut, roast beef and mashed potatoes, turkey, oysters and ham.

Erect New Building

Loyal workers, accustomed to cooperating in church enterprises have erected a new building which began its service to the eaters yesterday.

Known by various names, the barker calls out: "This is the Pennsylvania Dutch restaurant of the great Reading Fair." The decor of the new building, 50 feet from the grandstand, supports the theme.

Two large designs of Pennsylvania German art break the monotony of color above the entrance. These are authentic motifs extracted from a dinner plate of sgraffito pottery baked by George Huebner in 1789.

The other is a design which appears on one of the famous Schreiber dower chests made about 1790. Thomas Alexander, art instructor of the Conrad Weiser Area Schools, painted the designs.

In October 1954, Hurricane Hazel uprooted some large oak trees on the farm of Calvin Brown. Brown and his fellow members of St. Daniel's of Robesonia, cut the trees to lumber which then was used to build the roof and frame of the new structure on the Fairgrounds.

Business executives, knitters, florists, farmers and many others became carpenters, plumbers, painters and masons in the splendid cooperative enterprise.

In the center of all of the activity is the pastor of St. Daniel's, the Rev. Dr. Elmer E. Leisy. In the dialect, he calls attention to the food specialties that are being served.

His stentorian tones roll into the midway, penetrate the grandstand and ring the welkin as he summons all and sundry, "Kummesse; eat yourself full."

Volunteers Do Work

Waitresses, cooks and dishwashers attend to the service, cuisine and cleanliness. In one day, several years ago, 2,900 persons were sated in the old building. Everyone is pitching in to break that record this year.

St. Daniel's of Robesonia is not the only church which serves meals at the fair. We caught a whiff of tantalizing goodness as we passed the stand of Spies' Church and others. Church stands were doing a thriving business.

The newness of the "Eck Karich" structure, the initiative of its pastor, and the spirit of cooperation of all workers, drew us to this beehive of activity.

Rev. Dr. Elmer L. Leisy
... talking it up