

Historic Mennonite Congregation Invites Community to Bicentennial Celebratory Events

Early Swiss and German families seek farmland and religious freedom.

Members of the Slate Hill Mennonite Church, in Camp Hill, are inviting the community to celebratory events on Saturday, October 8th and Sunday, October 9th reflecting on their founding and growth in the region during the last 200 years.

Around 1710, early Mennonite settlers from Switzerland and Germany made their way to Lancaster County, looking for places to farm and to practice their faith without fear of persecution. In subsequent decades, some of these Mennonite families migrated further west to places such as the site of today's Slate Hill Mennonite Church in Camp Hill, Cumberland County.

To celebrate the courage and faithfulness of the first Mennonites in Cumberland County, members of Slate Hill Mennonite invite the community to honor the establishment of their first church structure in 1816. The structure was called a meeting house and was located on the crest of Slate Hill Road in Camp Hill. Previously the church had met in the home of the local Eberly family starting in 1791. The first church structure was removed when the current cemetery was developed. A newer church structure, now the Fellowship Hall, was occupied in 1876.

Celebratory events start on Saturday, October 8th and include:

Saturday, October 8th: The afternoon (1 to 3 p.m. and 3 to 5 p.m.) will feature bus trips into the congregation's history with church members Caleb Miller and Chris Zimmerman narrating. Attendees will view the homes of the earliest congregation members and other sites that played a role in the congregation's development to include the house in Lisburn where members met before the construction of the meetinghouse. The tour will then proceed to both the Churchtown and Erb's Mennonite Churches reviewing early connections to Slate Hill Mennonite Church.

Sunday, October 9th at 9:30 am: There will be a special worship service at Slate Hill with Paul Nisly (a previous Bishop for the Slate Hill Mennonite congregation and professor at Messiah College) preaching and recognition of former pastors. In the early days of the church's development, preachers were chosen by "lot" and often volunteered their service.

Sunday, October 9th at 11 am: David Weaver-Zercher, Messiah College professor and author of numerous books on Mennonite and Amish life, will present a special Sunday School class exploring the early Anabaptist roots in Cumberland County and other interesting historical anecdotes.

Sunday, October 9th at 12 pm: Fellowship potluck luncheon open to the public at the church.

Sunday, October 9th, 1:30 to 3 p.m. Observations will continue with an Open House including:

- Ancestry exploration of the congregation's founding families and today's descendents
- How Mennonite women played and continue to play important leadership roles in the church
- The founding and continuing connection of the Southeast Asia Ministry hosted at Slate Hill Mennonite

Those interested in attending any of the celebrations or bus tours are asked to contact the church by calling 717-737-8150 or visiting the church website <http://www.slatehillmennonite.org/bicentennial>.

All events and time are subject to change. Slate Hill Mennonite Church is located at 1352 Slate Hill Rd, Camp Hill, PA 17011.

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