

EXPLORING THE PAST

2. Learn about the Evangelical Association and Visit New Berlin

Helen Elizabeth Smith Biggs was the third child (of five) of the Reverend Samuel Smith and his wife, Helen Lovina Zeibach Smith. Helen Elizabeth was known to her family as “Tootsy”. Samuel Smith was an Elder in the Evangelical Association and is credited with helping to start a number of churches in Centre County, where he was born. Today you are going to learn more about the Evangelical Association and its roots in Union County, particularly New Berlin.

The Evangelical Association began as “Albright’s People”, followers of Jacob Albright. Jacob Albright was born in Montgomery County to German Lutheran immigrant parents. After the death of several of his children, Jacob began exploring other Christian denominations. He became a minister, but was not allowed to preach in German, so he branched off on his own with the Evangelical Association. As a new church, the Evangelical Association wanted to publish its own books, starting with a Book of Discipline in 1809. By 1815, the church had purchased land in New Berlin for a church building and publishing house. John Dreisbach was the first Presiding Elder and purchased the printing press with his own money. George Miller served as the first president of the Association, one of its Elders, started to compile the Book of Discipline and wrote an autobiography of Albright.

“The first church erected by the denomination was built on the same lot as the Publishing House. It was a one-story log building, 34 x 38 feet. The church and the Publishing House were dedicated on March 1-2, 1817. John Dreisbach recorded the day's events in his journal: *“Saturday, March 1, 1817: The Publishing House was built by the side of the church and the dedicatory services began in the evening when J. Stambach preached from Matt.26:41. After him I preached from Acts 3:19, and it went quite well for me.”* [taken from the Archives and History of the United Methodist Church]

Take a trip to New Berlin to see some of the historic landmarks. While nothing remains of the original buildings, there is a marker dedicated to the site, you can also visit the gravesite of George Miller, artifacts from the First Evangelical Church are housed at the Emmanuel United Methodist Church. To make arrangements, to visit the church, please call church historian, Tom Finsterbush, 570-490-3728. If you are able, make arrangements to visit the New Berlin Heritage Association. To visit the Heritage Association, please contact Mr. James Lengle, 570-966-1783.

Extra Work:

Read some of the “Annals of the Evangelical Association of North America and history of the United Evangelical Church”, available on line at https://archive.org/stream/cu3192405550899610_djvu.txt or the Evangelical Association on Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Association