

Churches in the Shenandoah Valley

Grace United Church of Christ
10492 Orkney Grade
Mt. Jackson VA 22842



A brief History

“Amid the push and rush of modern life, when so little time is given to reflection and thinking, it is urgently needed that we pause for a few moments of retrospection. It is only as we survey the record thus made that we can plan wisely for the future.”

Thus wrote Dr. W.B. Dutter in 1925, then pastor of Grace Church. How much more urgent it is to do so in these latter days!

Prior to the year of 1783, there was a church at Rudes’ Hill in which two groups worshiped – the Lutheran and Reformed. It is not now definitely known where it was located, or when it was built, but the generally accepted date is 1760.

In 1783 these two groups moved over to the Middle Road and combined with Pine Church.

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The Reformed group then became a part of MILL CREEK CHARGE. Over the years, Zions, Pine, Rader (Timberville), Solomons, St. Jacobs, St. Pauls, and Turleytown were parts of what was called MILL CREEK CHARGE.

In 1846 the Rev. Henry St. John Rinker began a long pastorate of twenty-eight (28) years in the Charge. He was pastor of the Reformed group in 1874 when it was decided, by mutual consent, to dissolve the union. Col. Levi Rinker, a member of the congregation, DONATED THE LAND UPON WHICH THE NEW CHURCH WAS TO BE ERECTED. He also gave the land for the original cemetery, and lots in town upon which to build the parsonage. Additional tracts, adjacent to the original cemetery were subsequently purchased by the congregation in 1953 and 1968 in order that more burial space might be available.

While the work of collecting the lumber and bricks was started, and the cornerstone laid in 1874, the building was not dedicated until August, 1875. In the time between their separation from Pine Church and completion of their own house of worship, the Otterbein United Brethren Church graciously loaned them the use of their sanctuary. The Reformed congregation relinquished to Pine Church their rights in the parsonage and church building upon payment by the Pine congregation of seventy-five dollars (\$75.00).

The Rev., Henry St. John Rinker, after his long years as pastor, was compelled by ill health to resign before the building was completed. Rev. A. J. Bowers was then the pastor when the church was dedicated.

The dedication was set for August 29, 1875. It was planned to be an affair of several days. Due to inclement weather on Saturday, the sacred concert to be given by the choir of the Church in Winchester, with The Rev. Charles G. Fisher, pastor, was postponed until Monday; as was also the communion service. The Consecration rites were administered by the pastor, The Rev. A. J. Bowers, and the name 'GRACE REFORMED CHURCH' was given to it.

The sanctuary was built in the customary German way – two doors to the front, one for men and one for women. It was divided through the middle of the pew section by a low partition for the same reason. Heat was provided by two wood-burning stoves, one on either side of the building. Kerosene lamps on hanging brackets and on the organ gave light.

Among the devoted laymen whose labors, gifts and council were so generously given to the Church in those early days, we find these names: LEVI RINKER, several other RINKERS, FUNKHOUSER, FANSLER, TISINGER, FRYE, JORDAN, CLICK, MOORE FILTZMOYER, WOLFE, STICKLEY, STOVER, SHUTTERS, GREEN RYMAN and ZERKEL (ZIRKLE).

At the time GRACE CHURCH was built, MILL CREEK CHARGE was composed of RADER, TRINITY (Timberville), ST. LUKES (County Line), GRACE (formerly PINE), ST. JOHN'S (Cross Roads) and JACOBS (now CHRIST, (Conicville.)

In 1882, Timberville and St. Lukes' were cut off. In 1885, EMMANUEL, Mt. Jackson was organized and added to the Charge. However, it drew quite a few of it's members from GRACE.

Until the pastorate of The Rev. Benjamin Hay, the records were scant and unclear. Rev. Hay's reports yield more information. Individual communion cups were put in use in 1914. In the summer of 1915, the building known as the "CHAPEL SCHOOL HOUSE" was donated to the church by Mrs. Sally Hepner. The offer to motive it to the new foundation at the northwest corner of the Church's hitching grounds for Forty Dollars (\$40.00) was accepted. The motive power was a big steam engine. The "Old School House" has been an instrument of our concern in the community. In addition to providing

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extra space for classes of the church school, it served as a meeting room for various church groups. For quite a number of years, the Rinkerton 4-H Club held its meetings and socials there. The Grange and the Farmers' Exchange also met in the building.

The first Thank-Offering boxes were ordered and used in 1916. And, somewhere in those years, acetylene gas lights were installed to supplant the old kerosene lamps.

It was also about this time that Solon Wolfe presented GRACE CHURCH with a new "Carpenter" organ. This organ served for many years, until the electric organ was purchased in 1969. A piano was added in 1972, further enhancing the worship services.

Records show that in 1916 a small kitchen was annexed to the "Old School House" in order to have fuller use of the building. This, too, as the years passed, became too small so, in 1952 a cistern and a larger kitchen were added to increase it's useability.

In 1917 both Sunday School and worship services were suspended for a time because of the outbreak of Infantile Paralysis in the community.

We have a record of the twenties from a statement by the late Rev. William T. Brundick which he made a short time before his death in March, 1964. Herewith, his message:

"In 1921 I became pastor of the Charge of which GRACE CHURCH was a part. I had just been graduated from the Theological Seminary and I came to you bubbling over with enthusiasm and energy to do things.

The first thing I noted when I entered GRACE CHURCH was that it had a Reading Desk, but no pulpit or Altar. I also noted that the Church needed painting inside.

At our first consistory meeting, I suggested that we start doing things – working together to make our Church more beautiful. When I suggested doing away with the two large wood-burning stoves which roasted part of the congregation, while freezing the other part, and talked of a furnace, one of the very oldest members declared "furnaces were unsafe and would blow up the Church."

When I talked of the Pulpit and Altar, some of the very old balked. It was too close to the old Denominational Crisis, known as the "Mercersburg Controversy" and to these people, I was trying to introduce "high church".

I no longer talked "altar", but did continue asking them to consider a Communion table. This, they did and we were given some fine walnut lumber by a friend, Mr. Hite. These two pieces, Pulpit and Communion table were beautifully made by Mr. Isaac Hite. These are still in use and we were all so proud of them. Mr. Lester Green made the Cross.

Then the furnace was placed and a window over the Alcove to give more air to that part of the building. This window was placed there by LLOYD DITZLER in memory of his father, Rev. Henry Ditzler, who had served GRACE CHURCH for a long pastorate.

I think it worthy of note that as each project was completed, GRACE CHURCH very promptly paid the bill *before* a Dedicatory prayer was said.

Other changes he did not mention were the changing of the arrangement of the pews to the present pattern, and from acetylene to electric lighting.

In 1929 the churches of the MILL CRFEEK CHARGE, and the REFORMED churches of Timberville and County line (ST. LUKE'S) were combined into a federated charge, making a five-point parish. This was pastored for ten years by The Rev. H.A. Behrens who made his home in the Timberville parsonage,

Following Rev. Behrens, the Rev. O.B. Michael served the Charge until 1947.

When GRACE CHURCH was dedicated, it was designated as "GRACE REFORMED CHURCH". In

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1934, after much negotiating, the Reformed Church in the United States, and the Evangelical Synod of America were merged to become the EVANGELICAL and REFORMED CHURCH. As the world-wide Ecumenical Movement grew, in 1957 the EVANGELICAL and REFORMED CHURCH merged with CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN to become the UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST. GRACE, then became what is now known as GRACE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST.

With the coming of the Rev. F.L. Fesperman as pastor in 1954, several changes in the Charge alignment were made. EMMANEUL in Mt. Jackson was dissolved, and a number of the members went to GRACE. In 19267 Conicville had been removed from the Charge and placed with the Edinburg Charge, leaving only GRACE and ST. JOHN'S. When GRACE CHURCH was overturned by the POWDER SPRINGS UNION CHURCH for attachment to the Charge, this became the three-point Charge it is today. POWDER SPRINGS UNION CHURCH was then renamed TRINITY and dedicated in 1955.

GRACE CHURCH had long felt the need of better facilities for the church school. To meet these needs, the Education Building was erected in 1962. A vestibule was also added to the front of the sanctuary at that time. The Education unit, with the library, the Pastor's Study, and five classrooms, is a decided asset to the work of the church. The library which was organized in the early sixties has been of special value to the work of the Church School. It contains books, Church School literature, audio-visual equipment, the Interpreter's Bible, and a new Encyclopedia Britannica.

It is interesting to note that in 1962, when the ground was broken for this addition, the first space-full of dirt was turned by Mrs. Molly Wolfe Myers, the oldest member present. It had been her father, George Wolfe, at the time a young man in the employ of Col. Levi Rinker, who broke the first ground for the building in 1874. This project also was paid in full by the contributions from members and friends by the time it was complete and ready for use.

EARLIER HISTORY

As Martin Luther was founder of the Lutheran church, Ulrich Zwingli was the founder of the Reformed faith. Grace United Church of Christ grew out of the Reformed Church of Germany and Switzerland.

In the spring of 1709, a large number of German immigrants came to Pennsylvania, many of the Reformed Church. It was not easy to keep up their religious life in the new world. Often no minister was available, so they asked a school teacher and farmer named John Boehm to become their pastor, who was later ordained and drew up a constitution for his congregations. Thus, the Reformed Church in America was born.

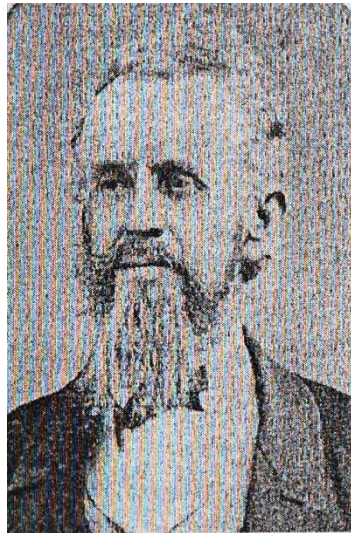
By the early 1700's many people in the Shenandoah Valley were of Reformed and Lutheran faiths. They shared facilities and ministers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Europe. In the 1730's a church was built on Rude's Hill, (near Shenandoah Caverns Road and Route 11), where Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed groups worshipped.

Prior to 1783, the Reformed and Lutheran Congregation moved to the Middle Road and were called Pine Church.

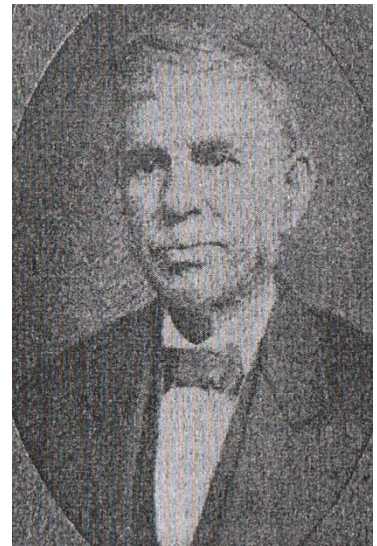
Excerpted from "Brief History Grace Church Mt. Jackson, Virginia 1874-1974"

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Col Levi Rinker donated the land



Rev Henry St John Rinker

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