

History of Doe Run Presbyterian Church

By Rev. Mervin J. Fry

Doe Run was born in the midst of revival and schism.

The Great Awakening was sweeping through America; preaching and conversion were dramatic and emotional. Those Presbyterians who favored the new religious fervor were ousted by the Old Side Synod of Philadelphia and organized themselves as the New Side Synod of New York in 1741. The schism lasted 17 years but at Upper Octorara it lasted a full ten years longer. Upper Octorara's pastor, Rev. Adam Boyd, remained a member of the Old Side Synod, and those members that favored the New Side organized the Second Congregation of Upper Octorara in 1741 and did not reunite with the old church until Rev. Boyd retired 27 years later.

In 1740 John Fulton, William Hanna, Francis Boggs, James Blelock and other members of Upper Octorara residing in East Fallowfield Township organized the Doe Run Church. Their sympathies are clear in that they were supplied by ministers from the New Side Presbytery of New Castle. Rev. George Whitefield, a proponent of revivalist preaching, spoke at the log cabin church located in the cemetery in 1743; and they called their first pastor, Rev. Andrew Sterling, in conjunction with the New Side Congregation of Upper Octorara.

In its first hundred years Doe Run had a rich variety of relationships with neighboring churches. The first three pastors Andrew Sterling, William Foster and Alexander Mitchel, gave three quarters of their time to Upper Octorara and one quarter to Doe Run. In fact, it was one of his Sundays at Doe run that Rev. William Foster, a vocal advocate of liberty during the Revolution, received word that a party of British light horses from Wilmington had orders from Sir William Howe to capture the fiery Presbyterian minister and burn the Upper Octorara Church. Although it was his custom to travel the eight miles to Doe Run on Saturday and return on Monday those weekends when he preached there, Mr. Foster returned to Upper Octorara unexpectedly on Sunday afternoon. The congregation hid him, his family and his library. When the British were informed that their mission was discovered and that they would meet resistance along the way, they returned to Wilmington.

When Upper Octorara called Rev. James Latta in 1810 for three quarters of his time, it expected Doe Run to extend a call for one quarter of his time; it did not. Perhaps the growing congregation wanted more than a quarter of its ministers time. In 1817 Doe Run called Rev. Elkanah Kelsey Dare, who gave half his time to Doe Run and half to Union Church near Oxford until his death in 1826. Doe Run continued its relationship with Union Church in calling Rev. Alexander G. Morrison in 1828. Six years later, Rev. Morrison resigned his charge at Union Church to give half his time to the newly established church in Coatesville.

For 23 years Doe Run and Coatesville shared Rev. Morrison, but in 1857 he resigned from Doe Run and went to Coatesville full time. From 1858 to the present doe Run has called their own minister.

Much more research must be done to understand God's mission for Doe Run during the second half of the 19th century. But one thing is clear. There was a strong lay leadership. No history of Doe run would be complete without understanding the contributions of elders like: Franklin Gordon, David young, William mode Elliot, John Howard Pyle, George R. Bone, W. J. Monholland, Charles Dale and Henry V. Ramsey. These men served as elders for life and gave continuity to a series of short pastorates. They were responsible for the building of the manse and the founding of the Sunday School in Modena. They continued the work at the Doe Run Valley Presbyterian Church begun in 1849. In 1870 the trustees of Doe Run were even responsible for the upkeep of the Unionville Church.

With the growth of Modena in the early 20th century and under the capable leadership of Rev. V. V. Nicholas and those pastors who followed him, Doe Run worked t5o meet the spiritual needs of a growing community.The Modena Chapel was built in 1915. The press reported the dedication of the chapel as "the greatest day in the history of Modena." The session minutes record that it was " the greatest thing Doe Run has ever done." For years, Doe Run and Modena were like one church meeting in two places, and then in 1953 Modena organized as a separate church with 61 members transferring from Doe run to Modena. The Modena church was strong in the 50's and 60's, but gradually weakened, finally dying in 1973, probably because of the changing economic situation in Modena.

The Doe Run Valley Presbyterian Church, organized in 1849 and now known as the Doe Run Chapel, was established as a preaching station under Rev. Morrison to serve the Doe Run Village area. In 1930 Rev. R.M. Ramsey labored there fruitfully among the families moving into the community from out of state as renters and managers of farms which were parts of large estates. Rev. Ramsey saw "great possibilities" in doe run Valley. However that may be, in 1931, the Doe Run Valley Presbyterian Church was sold and passed out of the control of the Doe Run Church. Today Sunday school continues there under the supervision of Willowdale Chapel.

For more than three decades of the 20th century the Doe Run congregation applied much of its efforts to expanding the physical facilities, actually tripling the usable space. At the 200th Anniversary in 1940, Rev. George Gillespie challenged it to provide a social room for its young people. Since that time the basement has been excavated and new rooms added. In 1961 Donegal Presbytery offered its congratulations to Doe Run on the dedication of its renovated and enlarged facilities: " We are especially delighted to observe the strong spirit of cooperation that prevailed among the people of Doe run as they pushed this project to its completion during a time when they had no minister." The mortgage was paid in full in 1973. Again strong lay leadership, so important in the last half of the 19th century, was in evidence during this period. Names that stand out are Norman Pugh, Frank Butterworth, Walter Carlin, Sr., Mary Carlin, Irvin Rubincam, Sr. and Charles Case, Sr.

In seeking to bring the Word of God to community, Doe Run established a preaching station in Coatesville, The Doe Run Valley Church, and the Modena Chapel. The first has grown large and quarrelsome, the second continues faithful but small in numbers, the third has grown and died. Doe Run continues, ready now to bring God's Word of redeeming love in Jesus Christ to the growing community of the 1990's.