

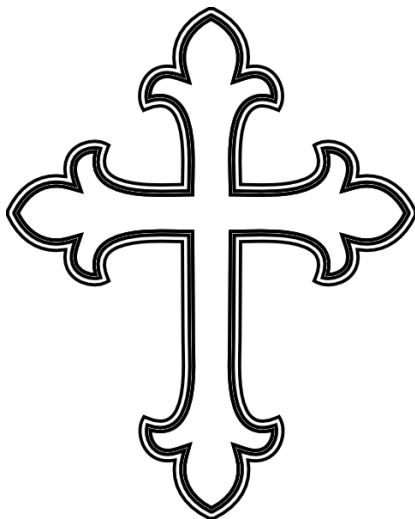
# *A Light on the Mountain*



A Brief History of the  
Locust Valley First Church of God  
1852-2017

# A LIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN

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Locust Valley First Church of God  
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*Compiled in Celebration  
of the 165<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Organization of our Church*

## **Preface:**

In his epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul sums up the Christian faith in these simple words: “The only thing that counts is faith working through love.” These words have inspired the actions of our congregation since its organization 165 years ago. As the first members of our church gathered together, the world in which they lived was in need of faith working through love. In 1852, our country was less than a decade from breaking apart into a bitter and violent Civil War.

The Rev. John Winebrenner, founder of the Churches of God and presider over the organization of our congregation on September 28, 1852, believed in the power of love to surmount the issues which divide us. In Rev. Winebrenner we find a passionate advocate for people, God’s creation; a believer in equality, an abolitionist who founded an anti-slavery society in 1836; and an early supporter of removing barriers to allowing women to take an active leadership role in the church. It was messages like these that inspired the people who heard the sermons of Rev. Winebrenner, including those who became the congregation of Locust Valley First Church of God.

Our congregation has faltered at times when we’ve lost sight of St. Paul’s words and Rev. Winebrenner’s message. Surviving two schisms over our history, our congregation knows the importance of empathy, understanding, and forgiveness. Emboldened from these lessons of the past, we embark upon another chapter in the history of our church, serving the needs of the diverse and changing kingdom of God that surrounds the native stone walls of our historic sanctuary.

This story, the people who played a part, and the message they inspire, is what we celebrate in 2017 as Locust Valley First Church of God marks the 165th Anniversary of our organization.

- *Jody Brumage*

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## *Part I: Our Origins*

### **Rev. John Winebrenner and the Church of God**

The Churches of God General Conference (historically the Churches of God General Eldership) is among the oldest Christian denominations to have been founded in North America as opposed to being brought from Europe by immigrants coming to the colonies and later, the United States. Established in 1825 when Rev. John Winebrenner left the German Reformed Church of which he was an ordained minister, the Churches of God is rooted in the revivalist movement of the Second Great Awakening which swept American Christianity in the early-19<sup>th</sup> century.

John Winebrenner was born on March 25, 1797 near present-day Walkersville in Frederick County, Maryland. His family attended Glade Reformed Church (now Glade Reformed United Church of Christ) and Winebrenner decided early in his life to enter the ministry. Since the German Reformed Church did not yet have a seminary of its own, Winebrenner apprenticed for the ministry with Rev. Dr. Samuel Helfenstein, Sr., of Philadelphia. Inspired by the perspectives of Dr. Helfenstein, Rev. Winebrenner developed a spirituality which emphasized the loving, warm nature of God rather than the sterile, hard tradition of many Calvinist Reformed Christians of the time period.

In 1820, Rev. Winebrenner was called to serve the Harrisburg Charge of the German Reformed Church, containing four congregations. In this ministry, Rev. Winebrenner first began acting upon the tenants of the faith he learned from Dr. Helfenstein, seeking to instill within his congregants a desire to build a closer relationship with God. He implemented some of the revivalist-type services encouraged by Second Great Awakening ministers like the Rev. Charles G. Finney including protracted prayer meetings, lasting hours and even days, and questioning the extent to which his congregants had accepted the Christian faith.

These controversial actions led his congregation in Harrisburg to send a list of grievances to the Synod (Conference) of the German Reformed Church, setting in motion a chain of disputes which led to Rev. Winebrenner being forced out of his assigned charge in Harrisburg. In 1823, he was locked out of Salem German Reformed Church in Harrisburg and in the next few years lost the support of his other congregations. By 1828, Rev. Winebrenner cut his ties with the German Reformed Church, after which his name was removed from the rolls of the Synod. However, those who supported Rev. Winebrenner and followed him out of the German Reformed Church became the foundation of a new denomination: the Church of God.

Rev. Winebrenner founded his new church on two core tenants: first that the Holy Bible is the only authoritative rule for faith and practice, and secondly that Christians should have a personal relationship with God. The Church of God adopted three of the Christian sacraments, renamed “ordinances” by Rev. Winebrenner: Holy Communion, Baptism, and Feet Washing. Furthermore, Rev. Winebrenner imposed a “believer’s baptism” by immersion in the doctrine for the new church, a departure from the German Reformed tradition. In 1830, Rev. Winebrenner was baptized for a second time (having been originally baptized as an infant in the Christian tradition) by immersion by the Rev. Jacob Erb, a pastor of the United Brethren in Christ Church.

In the same year, Rev. Winebrenner called together six elders from among his growing followers and formed the first eldership of the Churches of God. Rev. Winebrenner’s profile grew both through the expansion of the church he founded and also through his prolific writing and public speaking. He became a progressive advocate for pacifism and wrote several editorials opposing the United States’ war with Mexico in 1846.

Rev. Winebrenner also adopted a progressive stance on social issues which faced the United States at this time. He believed that the Churches of God should be vocal in standing up for the causes of

disadvantaged people. Rev. Winebrenner was an ardent abolitionist, first supporting the African Colonization movement (which sought to free slaves in North America and return them to a colony on the west African coast), but later arguing for complete abolition of the practice, adding to Church of God doctrine that “the system or institution of slavery is impolitic and unchristian.”

Other social issues which Rev. Winebrenner made public stances on included the abuse of alcohol and gender discrimination. As the temperance movement swept throughout American Protestantism in the second-quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rev. Winebrenner condemned the use of tobacco and hard liquor (though he still insisted that the church use wine for Holy Communion). One of the most revolutionary aspects of Rev. Winebrenner’s ministry was his inclusion of women in the leading of worship, allowing them to lead prayers and to address congregations at his tent meetings.

By the time of Rev. Winebrenner’s death in 1860, the Church of God expanded to include congregations throughout the eastern and midwestern United States. Furthermore, new Elderships were formed in the model set by the Eastern Pennsylvania Eldership (the first such organization founded by Rev. Winebrenner in 1830). These new Elderships included Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa, and Texas.

## **The Settlement of Locust Valley**

Maryland was still a colonial possession of Great Britain when the first European settlers arrived in present-day Locust Valley. For centuries, Native Americans had inhabited the area, seasonally migrating between villages to hunt and gather resources as they subsisted on the rich and plentiful land of the Blue Ridge. Locust Valley was certainly an enticing place to settle for English immigrants pushing further west from the established regions of Maryland in the early-18th century. The mountains offered a seemingly-endless supply of timber for construction, heating, and industrial endeavors such as the production of charcoal. Plentiful springs bubbled up from

the ground, providing fresh water and the fertile lands of the valley were ideal for agricultural pursuits.

On June 13, 1734, Osborn Sprigg surveyed the first tract of land on South Mountain. It was a farm named “The Forest” and was located about halfway between Locust Valley and Burkittsville. The first settlers to come to Locust Valley arrived in 1738. Their names were Miles and Frances Foy and they originally hailed from what they and their families claimed to be Baltimore County, Maryland.

Foy’s step-daughter was the wife of Thomas Cresap, an influential person in Maryland’s history. Born in England, Cresap immigrated to the Colony of Maryland and became a fur trader. He settled, along with his parents-in-law Miles and Frances Foy in the area of what is now Wrightsville, Pennsylvania. This area became a battleground between the colonies of Maryland and Pennsylvania, each claiming that the land belonged to them. Settlers were split, some paying taxes to Maryland, others to Pennsylvania, and both claiming legal jurisdiction over the area. Finally, tensions erupted into war. A party of Pennsylvanians led by John Hendrick attacked Cresap’s house. With the aid of William Boring, William Smith, and John Lowe, Cresap managed to hold his ground and the party of fifty retreated. However, on the night of November 24, 1736, Cresap, Michael Reisner, Miles Foy, John George Bare and Jacob Matthias were arrested by the Sheriff of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and taken to the jail in Philadelphia.

The conflict between Pennsylvania and Maryland is historically known as the “Conojohela War,” so named for the valley in which the hostilities occurred. Lost to the obscurity of history, the outcome of this land dispute resulted in the creation of the Mason-Dixon line, firmly establishing a border between Maryland and Pennsylvania. In time, this line became a symbolic border between the northern and southern United States.

After letters arrived at the jail from Samuel Ogle, the Proprietary Governor of Maryland, endorsed by King George II



demanding their release, the men were freed. Coincidentally, the letter from Maryland's royal governor was delivered by a young attorney named Daniel Dulany, who nine years later laid out the streets of a new town called Frederick. Upon their release from jail, Cresap and the Foy's left the Wrightsville area, Cresap becoming a surveyor and eventually moving to what is now Allegany County, Maryland, settling in a place called Cresaptown. The Foy's moved west as well, settling on two land tracts situated in a ravine at the base of South Mountain, the present-day location of Locust Valley.

Miles and Frances Foy's trip to Locust Valley was not easy. Most of the roads in this area, which was then a wilderness in western Prince George's County were only wide enough for a horse, known as "bridle paths." These roads often followed existing trails created by Native Americans. The only "public," or wagon road through the Middletown Valley was the road leading from the area of Frederick Towne to Conococheague (present-day Williamsport, Maryland). This road crossed South Mountain through Fox's Gap, following the path of today's Reno Monument Road. The Foy's likely crossed Catoctin (or Braddock) Mountain and entered the valley on this road, then followed "bridle paths" to Locust Valley. Records indicate that as early as 1768, the main route to Locust Valley was a bridle path that followed the approximate route of Marker Road. This can be substantiated by a deed for the "Stoney Ridge" tract, which was said to be located along this path and mentions it as an "old Indian trail".

The Foy's purchased two tracts of land, both surveyed on Nov. 28, 1738. One, entitled "Trimmling" was located in the area of the Marker Farm, the other, "Hunting Bottom" was located further up in the mountain, in the area where Locust Valley First Church of God stands today. Within a couple years, other settlers began to move into the area, and by the mid 1700's, there were settled tracts throughout the region, stretching from Locust Valley to Burkittsville.

Whether Miles and Frances Foy permanently lived in Locust Valley remains lost to history. However, records suggest that by 1756

when all of their land holdings were conveyed, some to their granddaughter Sarah Hoosman (Hensamer), the family had established some form of residence in the area. The last mark left by this “founding family” was one that would eventually lead to the creation of Frederick County. The first attempt to separate Prince George’s County was made in 1742, when the residents of present Frederick County asked for a new Episcopal parish to be created, resulting in the creation of All Saints Parish. One of the names appearing on the petition for this separation was Frances Foy. Six years later, in 1748, Frederick County was carved out of Prince George’s County, at which time it extended all the way to the western border of Maryland. It would remain this way until 1776 when Washington County was created.

A few years before the American Revolutionary War, a settler in Locust Valley established a business that operated well into the 20th century. Conrad Young migrated to America from Germany with his wife in 1770 and established a saw mill on 1,000 acres of timber tracts and farmland. Cutting the timber himself to build his mill, Young built a thriving business along a branch of Broad Run which ran along the south side of his property. The mill was located along Marker Road and its mill pond still exists on the Young Farm, while the stone foundation and overshot water wheel can be viewed during the winter months when the undergrowth loses its foliage. Conrad Young and his wife had two sons, Daniel and John. When he reached adulthood, John settled on a farm of his own at the base of Lamb’s Knoll, today owned by the Beachley family. Daniel Young took over his father’s operations at Locust Valley and managed them until 1864 when he sold it to Jacob, his son. The last owner of the mill, Ira J. Young, rebuilt the business after a devastating fire in 1908 and operated it until the 1940s.

By the latter half of the eighteenth century, most of the land in Locust Valley had been laid off into tracts. These included “Wilyard’s Lot,” surveyed on December 21, 1765 for Duvall Wilyard. This tract was located along the old Indian Trail (Mountain Church Road) and

extended southwards towards Burkittsville. “Stoney Ridge,” a plot of just 5 acres extended from the Locust Valley First Church of God southwards towards the Indian Trail (Marker Road). It was surveyed on August 3, 1768 for Joseph Keepheart. Perhaps one of the most important tracts to mention is one entitled “Locust Valley.” This timber tract was surveyed on July 30, 1790 for Thomas Van Swearingen, containing 384 acres located high in the mountain on Lamb’s Knoll, incorporating the area of Bear Spring Lake. The Van Swearingen Family immigrated to the colonies from the Netherlands and were prominent landholders, owning one of the primary fords crossing the Potomac River near present-day Shepherdstown, West Virginia. In addition to its prominent owners, this tract is important to the history of Locust Valley because it is the first recorded mention of the name that was given to the community that developed here in the early-19th century and to our church.

### **The Organization of our Church**

By the 1850s, the village of Locust Valley consisted of a scattered group of homesteads along South Mountain where families, mainly of German heritage, subsisted from their gardens, small farms, and timber tracts. A few families owned significant tracts of land which supported large farms. One of these families, the Siglers, became the patrons of our congregation. Henry and Sarah Sigler owned the farm later known to many as the Marker Farm in the center of Locust Valley. According to the memoir written by their son, the Rev. George Sigler, the family built a schoolhouse at the entrance to their farm lane and allowed religious meetings to be held there by various ministers who visited Locust Valley. In one entry, Rev. Sigler mentions the “River Brethren” being in the schoolhouse. The River Brethren, formally known as the Brethren in Christ Church, is a small German denomination founded in Pennsylvania (similar to the Mennonites).

However, no formal church was organized in Locust Valley until 1852 when our congregation, then known as Sigler’s Bethel

Church of God, was founded. In these years, the Churches of God established wide circuits or charges to which they assigned ministers to serve. Often times, these charges contained one or two permanent churches and several other appointed preaching spots where ministers would periodically visit. Locust Valley became one of these preaching spots on the Samples Manor Circuit, which was led by ministers who served at Samples Manor Church near Dargan, Maryland. Rev. John Winebrenner visited this circuit in 1852 and made Locust Valley the site of a tent meeting and revival service.

According to Rev. Sigler, in the fall of 1852, Rev. John Winebrenner and Elder Thomas Bean established a tent meeting at Ausherman's Schoolhouse, located in Arnoldstown between Locust Valley and Burkittsville. Rev. Sigler was among the first members of our congregation and was baptized by Rev. Winebrenner during the tent meeting.

He recalled the experience in these words:

“The subject of baptism presented itself to my mind but I was inclined to wait awhile, not however that my mind was not made up as to what Christian baptism was, but because I feared I might run too fast. I was told that if I saw my duty I had better obey at once. Accordingly with a number of others, I was buried with Christ in baptism by Elder John Winebrenner of Harrisburg. At the close of this camp meeting, a special meeting was held by Elders Winebrenner and Bean at Ausherman's School House near where I worked in Frederick County. Here what is now known as the Church of God at Siglers School was organized September 28, 1852. Although only eighteen years old and not present at the organization, I was appointed to the office of Deacon.”

At the close of this meeting during the last week of September in 1852, Rev. Winebrenner led the organization of Sigler's Bethel Church of God. The *Church Advocate* reported the organization in its issue of October 9, 1852, stating:

“On Saturday the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, we met Elder T. Bean at Ausherman’s Schoolhouse in Middletown Valley, MD., and assisted in holding a meeting over the following Sabbath. On Monday the 28<sup>th</sup> we organized a Church of God consisting of 15 members. Brother Henry McBride was elected Elder and Brother George Sigler Deacon. Some more, it is expected, will soon unite with this church in that place; as there are many serious people in the neighborhood, and some professors too, who are very favorable to the principles of the church, who did not join in full fellowship at the time the organization too place. May the Lord bless and prosper his people at that place, and wherever else he has recorded his name.”

## *Part II: Our Evolution*

### **From a Schoolhouse to a Church**

The first decade of our congregation’s story witnessed one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of Locust Valley. Nearly ten years after the founding of the church, the American Civil War divided the country in a bitter and violent conflict over the institution of slavery. Families in the village saw sons go off to fight in the war and experienced the economic and psychological distress of the conflict. However, the greatest threat to Locust Valley itself came in the fall of 1862 as the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, led by General Robert E. Lee, invaded Maryland in the hopes of capturing the United States Arsenal and Armory at Harpers Ferry. On Sunday, September 14, 1862, the Confederate Army clashed with the United States Army of the Potomac under the command of General George B. McClellan in the Battle of South Mountain. For residents of Locust Valley, the proximity of the village to Crampton’s Gap where the fighting took place brought the dangers of war very close to home. Farmers experience losses of crops and livestock and damage to their properties. Area residents had to care for the hundreds of wounded soldiers left behind as the armies marched on, fighting in the Battle of

Antietam just three days later on September 17, 1862, resulting in the bloodiest single day in American military history.

Despite the trying years of the war and the economic recovery which followed it, Locust Valley residents resolved to return to their normal lives as quickly as possible. A new era was beginning for the village, a time that would lead to its transition from a sleepy settlement of cabins and small farms to a local center of commerce. Supported by this growth and change, Sigler's Bethel Church of God also experienced the prosperity of the post-war years. For over twenty-five years, beginning at its organization in 1852, Sigler's Bethel Church of God worshiped in the schoolhouse that stood on Henry and Sarah Sigler's farm. In the mid-1870s, a new schoolhouse was built in Locust Valley and the church likely moved its worship services to this building. During this time, important institutions such as the Sunday School and Bible classes were formed in the congregation.

In 1879, Daniel Sigler donated a small lot from his farm to the church and work commenced on building a new house of worship. Construction was completed just before Christmas and the church was dedicated by the Revs. George Sigler and Christian H. Forney on December 21, 1879. A simple frame structure, this building still stands today as the core of the worship space now used by Locust Valley Bible Church. The Siglers also gave ground for a cemetery which was established immediately behind the church. Several meetings of the Maryland and Virginia Eldership were held at Locust Valley in the 1890s and early-1900s. It was also during this period of time that our congregation adopted its present name. The minutes of the Maryland and Virginia Eldership record that in 1898, the name of our congregation was changed from "Sigler's Bethel" to "Locust Valley Church of God." In these years, Locust Valley remained a congregation assigned to the circuit system with itinerant ministers serving the church's needs. Preaching services may have only been held once or twice a month, necessitating institutions like the Sunday School, Bible classes, and societies like the Christian Endeavorer's to

maintain regular activity for the congregation. Two ministers arose from our congregation during this time period: the Revs. George Sigler and Solomon J. Montgomery.

## **The 1907 Schism and Mount Hope Church**

The story of Locust Valley First Church of God is not without its darker chapters. In two separate occasions, forces both internal and external have caused divisions among the congregation. The first of these schisms occurred in the opening decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in this case, the problems arose internally within the Sunday School. A newspaper account from 1903 details a dispute between two families in the church over the disciplining of a child during a Sunday School class. While the connections between this episode and the larger conflict which split the church in the next few years are unknown, the record reveals that problems and disagreements existed within the congregation during this period.

In 1906, members of the congregation divided over the issue of the election of Sunday School officers. Two factions emerged in the controversy, one led by Elder John Pearl, who claimed to be the legal, elected representatives of the congregation. The other faction was led by Samuel Mentzer, who disputed the officers who were elected. As tensions rose, Mentzer initiated an effort to elect a new board of officers for the Sunday School. When his faction gathered in the church to do so, they were interrupted by Pearl and his followers, leading to a court case between the two sides.

Mentzer, Pearl, and other church leaders appeared before Justice J. Francis Smith in Frederick in January 1907. The Mentzer faction charged that Pearl and his followers had interrupted a religious service and thus prevented the election of Sunday School officers. For his part, Pearl argued that Mentzer was ignoring the duly-elected officers by trying to hold a new election. The court did not side with either faction, instead putting the onus to resolve the dispute on the church leaders. Regardless, the damage was done and when the Maryland and Virginia Eldership recognized Pearl and his followers

as the legally-elected representatives of the church, Mentzer and his followers left the church to form their own congregation.

Only a month after the Mentzer and Pearl factions went to court, the *Frederick News* reported that a new church was going to be constructed in Locust Valley. The article records that:

“one faction of the members of the Locust Valley Bethel Church of God near Burkittsville, this county, have decided to erect a new church and the site for the building has been staked off on the land of Mr. Samuel Mentzer, along the county road, some distance from the present church building. The new edifice will be erected of stone and will be 22x30 feet in size.”

The newspaper also reported that the new congregation had elected its own officers: Elders Samuel Mentzer, A. Norris, and Tilghman Norris, and Deacons Joshua Norris and William Turner. Construction of the new church was delayed for over a year due to the fire at Young’s Sawmill in 1908 which burned the lumber that had been cut for building the roof structure over the building. Even while the church was still under construction, burials were taking place in the adjoining churchyard, the oldest grave being that of Belle Frances Mentzer Sowers who died in March 1907. When the building was finished in 1909, the new church was named Mount Hope.

Unfortunately, the historical record does not give a clear story of Mount Hope Church beyond its establishment. From fragmentary mentions of the church in the area newspapers, the names of some of the pastors who served the Mount Hope congregation can be identified. These include Revs. H.T. Houf (1912), Silas Norris (1913), George Whiteside (1913), Robert J. Ridgley (1924-26), C.C. Masser (1931), and Herbert Nunly (1931-1932). The church also appears to have never formally organized as a congregation of the Churches of God General Eldership, likely since the conference had chosen to recognize the Pearl faction as the legitimate Locust Valley congregation. Different denominational affiliations for Mount Hope



Church found in the sparse records of the time include the Church of God, Baptist, Church of the Brethren, and Assembly of God. By the 1950s, regular services had suspended at Mount Hope Church and the building was left to deteriorate. The abandoned church collapsed in the late-1950s and was left a ruin of stone walls, though the bell, heard by a neighbor as it fell to the ground, was recovered and later donated back to the church.

## **A Prosperous Era**

Beyond the discord of the 1907 schism, Locust Valley Church of God enjoyed a prolonged period of growth and prosperity in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This prosperous period mirrored that of the village itself, which had expanded into a thriving rural commercial center under the leadership of the Sigler, Rohrback, Marker, Younkens, Burtner, and Ausherman families. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, William Marker erected a large general store in the village near the site of the original Sigler Schoolhouse. The Markers also added a chicken hatchery and grain elevator to their commercial complex in the 1920s. Just down the street, the Burtner Family opened a butchers shop which lasted into the early 2000s before finally closing. Other stores in Locust Valley were operated by the Rohrback, Younkens, and Ausherman families and supplied the needs of residents who had previously had to secure their own provisions or travel to Burkittsville to purchase them.

In the 1920s, Locust Valley became the center of its own circuit and for the first time could expect a minister to lead the worship services every Sunday. The first full-time appointed pastor was the Rev. T.A. Wastler. With this increased stability, the membership steadily grew to over 150 by the 1940s. Ministers of Locust Valley served various other congregations during their pastorates including Brunswick, Zittlestown, Germantown, Fairplay, Pleasantville, and Broadfording Churches.

Locust Valley also expanded its role in the community during

this time period. Members of the congregation formed an orchestra which played music for worship services and community festivals. The church picnic, held annually in August, was started in 1914. In its heyday, this event brought hundreds, even thousands of people to Locust Valley to hear ministers and musicians at Guyton's Picnic Grove. Another annual event which drew many to the community was Vacation Bible School, which often welcomed over 100 children to the church during the summer.

This period was also marked with great ecumenical activity. Locust Valley became a leading participant in summertime mountaintop services held at Gapland (later Gathland State Park). Beginning in 1915, these services were led by ministers from area churches including Locust Valley, St. Paul's Lutheran and Resurrection Reformed Churches in Burkittsville, Pleasant View Church of the Brethren in Broad Run, and the United Brethren and Lutheran Churches in Rohrsersville. One particular relationship led to many shared services and outreach efforts between Rev. Clarence Magaha and Rev. Dr. Harry C. Erdman of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Burkittsville.

Several improvements and additions were made to the church in this period, the first of which was the bell tower and vestibule, constructed in 1913 at a cost of \$300.00. In 1948, an annex was built on the north side of the sanctuary, initially used as a Sunday School Room. Around the same time, stained glass windows were installed throughout the church. A decade later in 1958, the church dedicated a new Sunday School building with an assembly room, eight class rooms, indoor restrooms, and an office for the pastor. Many of these improvements to the church were supported with contributions from Mrs. Mabel "Fern" Marker, wife of Dora D. Marker, one of Locust Valley's storekeepers. Marker sold the general store in Locust Valley in 1933 to Edwin and Mary Freed, moving his store to downtown Frederick. Before her marriage to Dora Marker, Fern Weddle Marker served as a school teacher in Locust Valley. Additional land was added to expand the churchyard during these years as well.

## *Part III: Perseverance*

### **The Schism of 1966**

Locust Valley Church of God was one of dozens of congregations in the Maryland and Virginia Eldership to be impacted by the schism of 1966, possibly the most difficult period in our church's history. In the summer of 1966, several ministers in the eldership raised issue with the Churches of God General Eldership's decision to join the National Council of Churches, a collaborative, ecumenical organization of nearly 40 Christian denominations. The discord arose as ministers accused the National Council of Churches of being a communist-sympathizing organization, bolstered by the tensions of the Cold War era. Following threats from the eldership to expel ministers who threatened to withdraw over the matter of ecumenicalism, several churches in Maryland held votes to decide whether to remain in the Churches of God or to become independent.

On June 27, 1966, Locust Valley Church of God officially voted to withdraw from the Maryland and Virginia Eldership at the urging of the Rev. Eugene Burge. The decision was not free from controversy. The newspaper accounts of the vote state that 70 members voted to withdraw, a number lower than the membership of the time. While the vote was deemed "unanimous," a significant group from the congregation, numbering between 50 and 60 people, determined that withdrawing from the Eldership was not the appropriate action and decided to remain. Locust Valley was not the only congregation to divide into two separate churches as a result of the schism. Members of the Antietam and Hagerstown Churches also divided into two congregations.

Without a pastor and church building, Locust Valley Church of God members gathered for worship in the wash house at the home of Elder Robert Butts. Sunday School classes were held in rented spaces in Burkittsville, including the Parish Hall of St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

The congregation reorganized its leadership, elected new council officers, and obtained pastoral leadership from Rev. Paul Moore of Edgewood Church near Frederick. Despite the dire situation, the congregation remained committed to gathering for worship, maintaining the Sunday School and youth programs, and seeking a path forward for the Locust Valley Church of God.

## **Rebuilding Mount Hope**

A new chapter in the history of our church opened in the spring of 1973. Church trustees Clarence Rohrback, John W. Sigler, Robert Butts, and Donald L. Byrd met with Louise Higdon, Clarence Norris, and Lettie Norris, the last remaining heirs to the trustees of the old Mount Hope Church to discuss acquiring the ruined building. On June 9, 1973, the Mount Hope Church building and churchyard were deeded to our congregation. With a new property in hand, the congregation set about rebuilding the church.

During the summer and fall of 1973, members of the congregation and community worked together to rebuild the stone walls of the church. The walls had been significantly damaged under the weight of the collapsing roof, requiring significant restoration. By the winter months, the walls had been rebuilt up to the roof level. The following spring, the roof was put in place and the interior was completed under the direction of Franklin E. Taulton. By April, the building was nearing completion and the bell from the old Mount Hope Church, rescued by Mr. Herbert Merryman from the ruins, was returned to its place in a new belfry. The interior was fitted with pews and lights purchased from the old Missionary and Alliance Church in Brunswick, a pulpit and presider's chairs donated by the Westminster Church of God, and other furnishings provided by members of the congregation.

On April 21, 1974, Mount Hope was officially rededicated as the Locust Valley First Church of God. The cornerstone, bearing both the original construction date (1909) and the rebuilding date (1974)

was laid by the Revs. Clarence Magaha and James Painter and the service was attended by over one hundred people. When the new church was opened, the congregation finally returned to a state of normalcy and entered into a new period of development. Three years after the rebuilding took place, the church was improved with the addition of a vestibule on the front of the building. In 1980, the church acquired a trailer which was renovated to serve as a Sunday School Hall. Also in the 1980s, the Rev. Mary Crampton became the first female minister to lead the congregation.

### **A Time of Renewal**

Although the rebuilding of the church in the mid-1970s led to a renewed interest in the congregation, Locust Valley struggled in the years after the schism of 1966. By the 1990s, the church membership dropped below ten faithful and dedicated members who nevertheless persevered in faith and hope. The church returned to charge pastors, served for a time by Rev. Joseph Burdette from Mount Briar Church of God. Since the early 2000s, Locust Valley has been served by pastors who also minister to the Pleasantville First Church of God near Sandy Hook, Maryland.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the story of Locust Valley has shifted from one of survival to one of renewal. Under the pastorates of the Revs. Mark Halliday and Richard Frederick, the membership has slowly but steadily grown, fostering renewed efforts in the congregation including the building of a strong outreach ministry. The congregation regularly supports area organizations such as the Middletown Valley People Helping People, the Middletown Valley Food Bank, and the Religious Coalition for Emergency Human Needs, all of which distribute resources and money to families in need.

The congregation also focused on improving its church and campus. In 2007, the sanctuary was reformatted to serve the more liturgical nature of our worship services. The altar, previously

situated to the side of the chancel, was moved to the center, the pulpit and lectern placed on either side, and the altar rail split in half to allow for a central access to the chancel. Then in 2012, the church added a restroom to the back of the building and, thanks to the generous support of Sword Masonry of Hagerstown, Maryland, repointed the stone walls. The most recent project to enhance the campus of Locust Valley First Church of God occurred in 2016 when our Sunday School Hall was completely renovated with new floors and fresh paint and repurposed to serve as our Fellowship Hall.

In the year 2017, Locust Valley First Church of God exists as a congregation of renewed vigor, emboldened by a legacy of perseverance and faith. Our congregation proves that small churches can indeed support prosperous and effective ministries. Locust Valley is today the second-oldest Church of God congregation in Maryland (only Carrollton Church near Westminster is older) and we are inspired by our past, but hopeful for the future too. In the words of Rev. John Winebrenner at the founding of our congregation: “May the Lord bless and prosper his people at this place, and wherever else he has recorded his name.”

## **Resources:**

Churches of God General Conference. *Historical Introduction to the Churches of God, General Conference.* (Website)

Forney, Rev. C.H. *History of the Churches of God in the United States of North America.* Harrisburg, PA (1914).

Gossard, J. Harvey. *John Winebrenner: From German Reformed Roots to the Churches of God.* United Church of Christ (Website).

Moss, Sr., Rev. James W. *S.J. Montgomery: Faithful Worker.* Harrisburg, PA (1995).

## *Part IV: Appendices*

### **A List of the Ministers who have served Locust Valley**

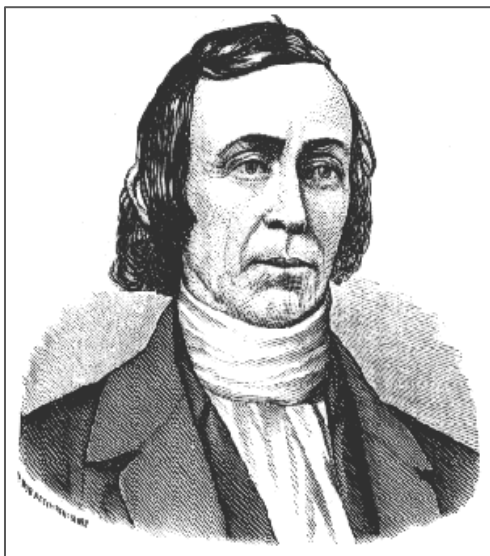
#### Circuit-Riding Pastors:

Rev. George Sigler  
Rev. Abraham W. Philhower  
Rev. A.X. Shoemaker  
Rev. James Wesley Kipe  
Rev. William Palmer  
Rev. Peter Lookingbill  
Rev. George W. Bowersox  
Rev. Solomon J. Montgomery  
Rev. William H. Engler  
Rev. Samuel A. Kipe  
Rev. J.A. Staub  
Rev. W.S. Shimp  
Rev. L.F. Murray  
Rev. George Masser  
Rev. C.A. Reynolds  
Rev. J.W. Saxton  
Rev. P.D. Cunningham  
Rev. Levi Wagamon  
Rev. Vernon Heffner

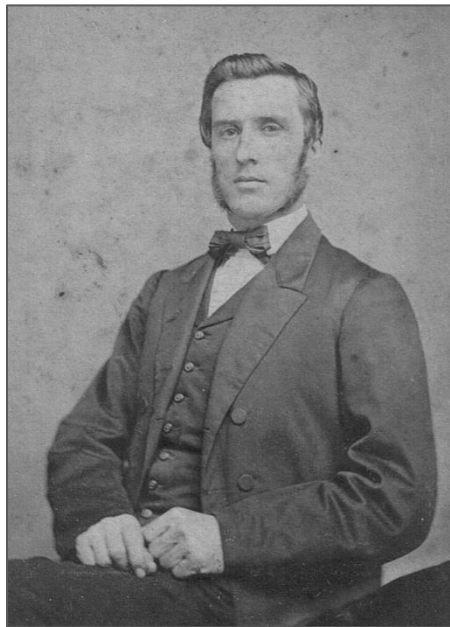
#### Full/Part Time Pastors:

Rev. T.A. Wastler  
Rev. William A. Herpich  
Rev. Gardner R. Taylor  
Rev. A.W. Frazier  
Rev. Clarence Magaha  
Rev. Claire Ebersole  
Rev. John W. Gossert  
Rev. Eugene Burge  
Rev. Paul Moore, Sr.  
Rev. James Painter  
Rev. Ernest Witmer  
Rev. Mary Crampton  
Rev. Clyde Ward  
Rev. Joseph Burdette  
Rev. Terry Marshall  
Rev. Mark Halliday  
Rev. Richard Frederick

## Historic Photographs

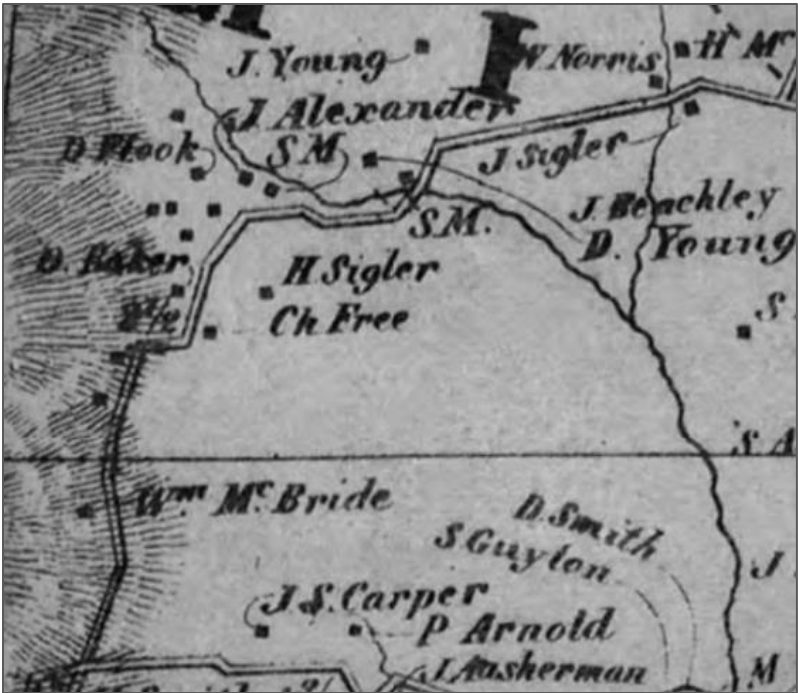


Rev. John Winbrenner



Rev. George Sigler





Detail of Locust Valley from the Isaac Bond Map of Frederick County (1858) showing the label “Ch Free” and the Sigler Farm, the first location where our congregation worshiped.



Children outside the Locust Valley Schoolhouse in 1919, one of the places where our congregation worshiped.



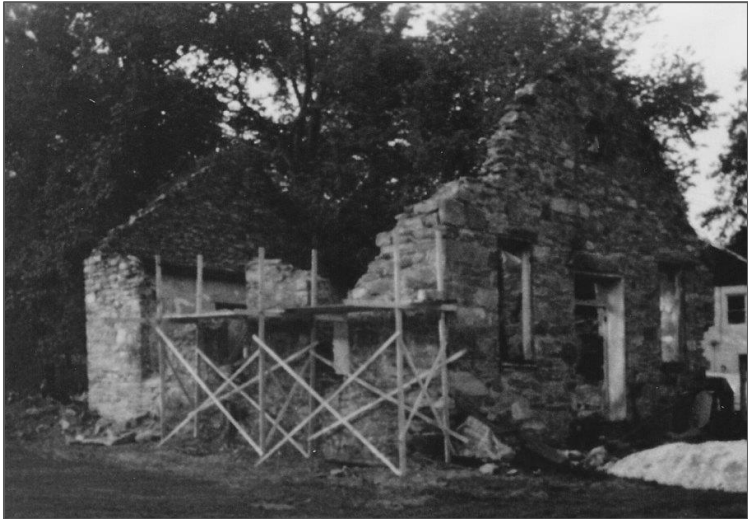
Our first church building, circa 1920.



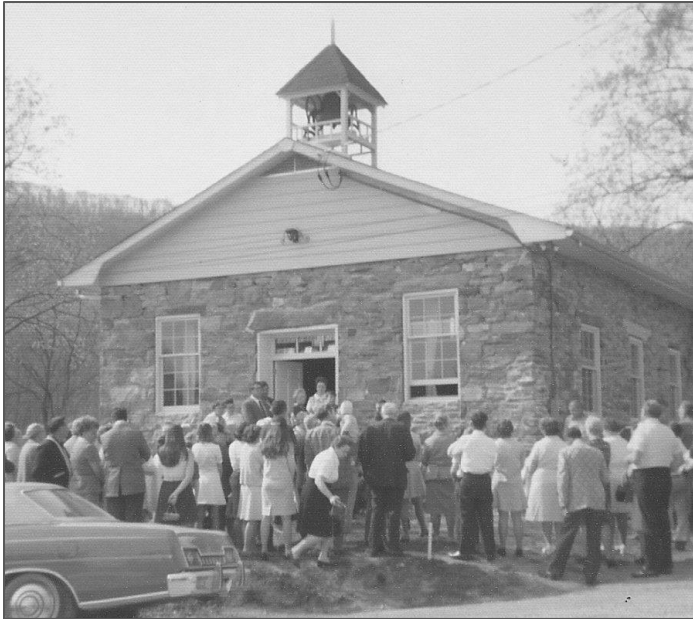
Vacation Bible School Class in the mid-1960s in front of the 1958 Sunday School Annex.



The abandoned Mount Hope Church.



Work commences on rebuilding the church in 1973.



Rededication of the Church on April 21, 1973.



The sanctuary on Easter Sunday, 2017.