

York Dispatch

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Section: RELIGION

Saint John turns 250

EYANA ADAH MCMILLAN The York Dispatch

Ruth Linebaugh has been a member of the Episcopal Church of Saint John the Baptist for six decades. And she still gets that feeling whenever she walks into the sanctuary.

"You feel like you're in God's world," said Linebaugh, of Manchester Township. "The reverence is there. It's always been a wonderful place to worship."

Linebaugh and about 700 fellow members of the church, located at 140 N. Beaver St. in York City, are celebrating its 250th anniversary.

The church will have celebratory events throughout the year. A service of "Choral Evensong with Sermon" is at 7 p.m. tonight, featuring the adult choir of the Cathedral Church of **St. John** the Divine of New York City.

St. John was started in 1755 as a mission of a Church of England organization called the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, said Polly Stetler, head of **St. John's** history committee, part of the 250th Anniversary Commission.

The church's first missionary was the Rev. Thomas Barton, who also served other church plants in Carlisle, Cumberland County, and York Springs, Adams County.

In York, worship services were held in barns and other buildings.

Building begun in 1769: Construction of **St. John's** building was started in 1769 and took about two years to complete. Several renovations were done on the building between 1810 and the 1850s, said Stetler, a **St. John** member for close to 25 years.

A notable rector was Rev. Daniel Batwell, who served **St. John** during the time of the Continental

Congress that met in York from September 1777 through June 1778.

The Congress, which fled to York from Philadelphia to escape British troops, adopted the Articles of Confederation in November 1777 in York.

However, Batwell made it clear to the Congress that he supported the British monarchy and was dunked in the Codorus Creek three times by "certain violent friends of Liberty" and put in jail. He was released because of ill health and went to Philadelphia, eventually returning to England, Stetler said.

Revolutionary connections: **St. John** also is known for its burial ground, which has graves predating the 1800s. Among church members buried there are Maj. John Clark, who was George Washington's aide during the Revolutionary War, and Col. Thomas Hartley, a Revolutionary War soldier who became a lawyer and York County's first congressman.

The church also houses the county's historic Liberty Bell, on display in the nave of the church. It was presented to the church in 1774 by Queen Caroline of England. Because the church lacked a belfry at that time, the bell was placed on the pavement in the town square.

In 1776, the bell was hoisted in the cupola of the Court House and rung to proclaim the glad tidings of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The bell also was used to call members of the Continental Congress to their sessions. The church reclaimed the bell in 1841.

The Rev. David Lovelace, **St. John's** pastor, said he hopes the 250th anniversary celebration will inspire congregants to continue the church's tradition of active presence in the York community.

"This congregation is a wonderful, faithful group of people," he said. "We encourage them to learn from our history and find what talents and interests they have and share them to make a difference in the community we're a part of."

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