

Jackson Township

Cambria County, Pennsylvania



Chapter 14

Annals of Jackson Township

Mrs. Betty Burkhart
Nanty Glo Journal
July 16, 1942

Pike Brethren Church

The Pike Brethren Church at Mundy's Corner employed the same ministers as the Vinco Brethren did up until recent years. The Davis, Burkhart, Kerr, Gray, Plgarts, Good, Stewart and Byers families were among the first members of this congregation, and descendants of these families are still active participants at the church. Later the David Rose family became members and their descendants make up a large part of the present-day membership. After the decline of the Evangelical Church situated nearby, many of its members attended the Brethren church, although several of them continued to worship among those of their own faith at distant churches.

In 1911 it was voted to move the church across the road from where it then was and remodel it, and money was donated to proceed with the work. John Gray of Ebensburg gave the money to have the church, moved and Al Hoy of Johnstown did the work. Mrs. Thomas Davis—widow of "Captain Tom" Davis, early residents of this community, a daughter of Joseph Burkhart, a first settler, was a generous giver to the church. On January 9, 1912 the work was complete and dedication services held.

Mr. Gray bought three acres of the land adjoining the church building and sold it off in lots at ten dollars for each lot until he got what he had paid for the entire piece, then donated the remainder of the land to the church to be used for a cemetery. The land was originally the Vickroy estate.

From time to time the church building has undergone repairs. When Rev. Forest Byers, grandson of Elder William Byers, one of the early and best remembered pastors, was the pastor the interior of the edifice was changed considerably. Two rooms were added and an outside entrance was built that led to the basement.

A bell was installed in the belfry later which was a gift from William Byers, a son of the Elder Byers, who lived at that time in this community, but who spent the latter part of his life at Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

During the recent pastorate of Rev. Kenneth Ashman the value of the church property was greatly increased by the building of a modern Cape Cod cottage, the erection of a two-car garage, and extensive repairs to the church building. The basement was divided into rooms for the use of the Sunday school, a small room was added to the rear of the church and other minor features added that increased the beauty of the building. The lawn was also graded and seeded and walks built.

Perhaps the best remembered of all the early ministers at this church was William Byers who was ordained in the German Baptist Church to the ministry in June, 1866 and installed by Henry Kurtz and John Knicely. Following the denominational division in 1882 he cast his lot with the Brethren Church and was given the territory known as the Conemuagh congregation, which included the local church. Elder Byers, besides

preaching at the Pike Church, also traveled to other places to preach the gospel and according to the early write up about him in the Johnstown Tribune (1907), "He was among that band of earnest, rugged, zealous men who, besides hewing homes out of the mountains and forests for themselves found time to travel, administer consolation to the dying, preach the gospel, visit the sick, and unite in marriage those matrimonially inclined, and all without charge, never asking a penny for their services. Their journeys often covered scores of miles over the rugged mountains and their paths frequently were marked out by the deer and used as bridle paths by our hardy pioneers. Theirs was no college education. No school of theology had taught them the great fundamental truths of the Gospel of the lowly Nazarene but the simple earnest manner in which they taught the story of the cross was well-sufficient for their eager honest hearers."

Rev. Byers was born in Bedford county in 1823 and when he was about twelve years old his parents moved to Cambria county and settled near Johnstown. He married Rachel Cain in 1842. She died in 1885 and in 1891 he was married to Isabella Wilkinson.

According to the Tribune article, "Elder Byers was a man of extraordinary physical strength and in his younger days stood much in the same relation to the fuel question that our coal miner does today. At that time wood furnished the fuel for all occasions. All the iron furnaces used charcoal and the engines of the Portage Railroad were fired with wood and the hardy young mountaineers became expert woodchoppers. Billy Byers with his ax weighing seven pounds was never beaten in the many contests he had with the men who claimed to be hard to beat. He chopped hundreds of cords for his friend, Col. Jim Cooper, who was superintendent of the Old Cambria Furnace on Laurel Run. During the life of his first wife, Rev. Byers bought a farm in Jackson township near the Stone Pike which he cleared and improved and which is now one of the best in this section and on which he resided until his death." This farm was later occupied by his son, William, and his family, and is now owned and occupied by Stephen Gallo and his family.

Mr. Byers met his death in a very tragic manner on November 15, 1917. On Thursday evening, November 14, he had gone to the home of his son, George, near Vinco to perform the marriage ceremony of his granddaughter, Ottie Byers, and Howard Rose. He was spending the night at his son's home and about midnight retired. At 3 o'clock the family heard a noise as of a heavy body falling and upon investigation found the aged minister lying at the foot of the stairs, bleeding and unconscious. He had arisen and wandered to the head of the stairs and pitched headlong to the bottom, striking his head against the wall and fractured his skull. Dr. Wakefield was called and did what he could but the injured man never regained consciousness and died about eight o'clock.

Rev. Byers was the father of sixteen children. Most of his descendants reside in Cambria county. In this township we have Louis Byers of near Vinco and Mrs. Elmer Simmons of Mundy's Corner, who are the grandchildren of this early pioneer minister.

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