

The Lutherans

~ Chronology, before 1900 ~

- 1623 The first permanent settlement of Lutherans arrived from Holland, at Manhattan Island.
- 1638 An independent colony was established by Swedish Lutherans along the Delaware River at Fort Christina; it became known as New Sweden.
- 1745 This year marks the onset of German Lutheran migration into North Carolina. They settled parts of the counties of Alamance, Cabarrus, Catawba, Davidson, Guilford, Iredell, Lincoln, Rowan, Stanly, and Wilkes.
- 1748 The first real Lutheran merger came about when Henry Melchior Muhlenberg from the University of Halle organized the pastors and congregations in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Maryland into what came to be called the Ministerium of Pennsylvania.
- 1750 The great influx of Lutherans in the mid-18th century was to Pennsylvania, with Lutherans numbering 30,000. 80% were Germans; the remainder were Swedish. From Pennsylvania, they swept into New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina.
- 1830 From about 1830 until 1850, large numbers of Norwegian and Swedish Lutherans came to Northern Illinois and Wisconsin.
- 1840 From 1840 until about 1850, huge numbers of Germans immigrated to the United States, primarily Lutherans and Catholics. The million Germans coming from 1850 until 1860 were mostly Lutheran.
- 1847 The Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church organized with twelve congregations under the name of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri.
- 1863 The Civil War brought about the formation of the United Synod of the South.
- 1870 By this date, the Lutherans comprised the fourth largest Protestant group in the United States. Then, from 1870 until 1910, approximately 1,750,000 Lutherans arrived from Norway, Denmark, and Sweden.

~ Records, Resources ~

Lutheran church records are among the best available. Persons tracing German or Scandinavian ancestors will find these records invaluable.

Much reorganization has taken place in the middle 20th century so that it becomes necessary to identify the correct synod within which to search for records. Before consolidation, there were as many as 150 Lutheran bodies in the U.S., but that number is now reduced to nine. In 1988, the American Lutheran Church merged with the Lutheran Church in America and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. With 5.2 million members, it is the largest of the Lutheran bodies. Ranking second, with over two million members, is the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church.

Congregations are usually united in synods composed of pastors and lay representatives elected by their congregations. A congregation is administered between its annual meetings by a church council composed of the pastor and a number of elected lay officers.

Archival holdings are scattered among several repositories, often reflecting ethnic backgrounds. Some hold microfilm records which can be searched.

Generally, individual church registers are in the possession of the local parish. They contain vital information on an individual--baptism, confirmation, marriage and funeral records.

If a church merges with another church, the records are generally transferred to the merged body. If, however, a church disbands, its records are often forwarded to a church archive.

~ Bibliography ~

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