

ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH AND  
CEMETERY

(The Hill Church)

Bounded by Saint John's Road, Henninger's Road and surrounding  
fields

Berrysburg

Dauphin County

Pennsylvania

HALS PA-17

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

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### ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH AND CEMETERY (The Hill Church)

HALS NO. PA-17

- Location:** Bounded by Saint John's Road, Henninger's Road and surrounding fields  
Berrysburg, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania  
Latitude: 40.5874 Longitude: -76.817 (North facade of church, Google Earth,  
Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)
- Significance:** Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church has served the spiritual needs of the members of Lyken's Valley since 1780. The "Hill Church" sits atop a large hill and serves as a central landmark for the region. During early colonization of Lyken's Valley, the church building could be seen for miles and was used as a beacon for giving directions. Saint John's Evangelical is also the oldest continuously-functioning congregation and has one of the first cemeteries for the area. Prior to the formation of the Saint John's Cemetery, people would customarily bury their dead in private graves located on family-owned land. The church building and its adjacent cemetery chronicle some of the major trends occurring throughout history by the location, quantity, and stylization of many of the markers throughout the cemetery. The Church has also had a significant impact on land development within its surroundings. While once covered by trees, the church's current site has witnessed a range of uses and building development such as farming and real estate development.
- Description:** Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church is constructed upon the foundation of the early buildings that preceded it. The current building is built out of brick and in the Italianate style with Gothic details. The three part façade of the building included a central projecting tower with double door entrance. Located above the door in this vertical band is a stone panel denoting the founding and construction of the original church building on the site. A long, narrow, double arched window sits atop this historical marker. Inside the frame is decorated by vibrant hues of yellow, red, and purple, as biblical stories are retold through the artistry of stained glass. The glass is surrounded by thick white frames and sills which are crafted to reflect the trim work located through most of the interior furniture of the building. Ornamental bricks outline the top of the arched window and direct the eye upward towards yet another stained glass window. This windowpane however is much shorter in size and culminates at the base of the sanctuary's roof. The doorway is flanked by lanterns. On either side of the projecting central tower are two stained glass windows. These windows are stacked on top of the other and are of the same design as the central tower window, however these openings are fitted with less vibrant colorings, and are only half as wide. The church's roof slopes up at a thirty degree pitch and is clad in slate with a deep cornice. The Steeple sits on top of the roof and rises in tiers of rectangular shapes which get progressively narrower as they ascend. Inside

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the middle tier, encased in a star shaped cage, is the open bell tower. The spire is covered in a copper with a green patina. A cross affixed to the top. The interior of the building has an open floor plan with few rooms and permanent spaces. Only the pastor's office, bathrooms, nursery, and kitchen spaces are partitioned. The remaining space is flexibly-used for functions such as Sunday school, children's pageants, youth groups, and congregational dining. The second floor of the church is accessed by either the twin half spiral staircases that flank the entry/reception space, or by a newly installed handicapped accessible elevator. The second floor holds the sanctuary which is lined on both side walls with stained glass window openings. Four rows of hand crafted pews fill the space. The altar is on a raised platform for easy viewing by the congregation. Located in front of the altar are large flags, candles, and a biblical inscription inlaid with gold leaf. A large balcony surrounds the perimeter of the sanctuary but mainly is only used to hold the large pipe organ and church choir, as structural safety has been a growing concern.

The church is surrounded by agricultural fields that the church rents to local farmers to cultivate corn. Some buildings such as an old barn and parsonage are serve as landmarks as to previous uses of the site. Trees line the approach to the building from the road, and help to frame the building in a picturesque manner. A large cemetery is also located on the site. The original burial sites are located directly behind the church building. The stones in the cemetery are placed in long horizontal rows and range in date, shape, and appearance. Plots become newer the further back you go as the church began to have to sell farmland to account for new burial sites. Some of the newer stones are larger and many of the older stones are shorter and worn, almost illegible. The church commands a prominent location on the hill providing a panoramic view of the entire Lyken's Valley.

History: The church's history began back with the earliest inhabitants of Lyken's Valley. Early German settlers came into the area due to the abundant natural resources. As settlements formed, people began to create communities and relate to one another. Eventually small informal churches were developed where people could come to worship. The first permanent settlement in the area occurred in 1750. However, it wasn't until the year 1773 that the first congregation of Saint John's was established. Reverend Michael Enderline united the individual praise groups into one large congregation. By 1780 the first church building had been planned and started construction. The building was similar in shape to the building of today, but was constructed entirely of wood. The site and materials were chosen because of the ease of transport and abundance of the materials in the area. Also, the building was located to serve as a spiritual landmark for new settlers coming to the valley. The church quickly acquired the land surrounding it and established a large working farm with barn, fields, and pens for livestock. By operating this small farm the church tried to help local families that were struggling to supply enough food for their members. The building was called a

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school house design because of its simple box shape. The church was finished in 1798 but was not dedicated until October 24, 1802 because the parish did not have the finances to pay the building off in full. This structure stood until 1875 when plans were put into motion for a new building, which is the Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church that stands today. The church congregation has had a long influence on the communities that surround. Many of the buildings adjacent to the property are all former parsonages. As different pastors moved into the congregation, they would accommodate their living conditions to fit their needs. Many simply saved money, purchased a house, and helped to establish the context around the property. The site, while once covered in trees, was stripped for farming, but that too is slowly been done away with. There is no more livestock, the remaining fields are rented out to cultivators, and the old remaining barn serves as a storage shed. The cemetery serves as an interesting addition to the site. Prior to the establishment of the cemetery, people would bury their dead on their own land. Many of the graves are so old that the church cannot identify the bodies. Many of the older sites house mass graves and stones that are etched in German. Among some of the earliest stones in the cemetery can be found the final resting place of Michael Enderline, the founder of Saint John's as well as nine tombstones of fallen patriots from the Revolutionary War. Major events throughout history are reflected in the stones such as the war of 1812, Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the great depression. The Tombstones serve as a timeline for families within the Lykens Valley as families of similar names and titles are grouped together.

Sources: Bruner, Thomas. Personal interview. 25 Nov. 2011.

*Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church 1780-1955*. Berrysburg: Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 2005. 4-57. Print.

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