

Exploring the Cemetery: Louisa Doerr and her brother, Rev. Philip Doerr



Louisa (Doerr) Leeking is buried in section 2 of the cemetery, lot 46. She was born Feb. 19, 1842, in Lancaster, to Philip and Margareth (Hess) Doerr. She married Christian Leeking in November 1859, before her 18th birthday and had her first child, Henrich, in August 1860. She died Nov. 15, 1880, at age 38, having had nine living children, including a set of twins. At the time of her death she was also caring for her father, Philip. Life was hard for women in the 19th century. Her photo is at the left.

Louisa had a brother, Philip Jr., whose life took a quite different path. Philip was two years older than Louisa. He attended Pennsylvania College (now Gettysburg College), and during the battle of Gettysburg, he served in the militia along with other students. At his commencement ceremony in 1864, he was given the honor of delivering the German Oration.

He found favor with Thaddeus Stevens, and after graduation, Stevens secured him a position with the Arsenal Dept in Washington DC. However, Doerr left that post in February 1865 and returned home to Lancaster to marry Wilhelmina Bream. He then left immediately to join the 192nd New York Infantry to serve until the end of the war.

After the war he taught in Kingswood, W. Va., and Cumberland, Md. In the latter location he studied theology with Rev. A. J. Weddell and Bishop C. F. Heyer and was ordained as a Lutheran Minister in 1868. He then served numerous congregations throughout central and western Pennsylvania, including in Everett, Bloody Run, McConnellsburg, Venango, Connellsville, Warren, Sarversville, Delmont, Brush Creek and Adamsburg. He even served a stint in Salt Lake City in an effort to minister to Lutherans and convert the Mormons.

Doerr seems to have been the point man for congregations struggling with the language issue. Throughout the last half of the 18th century, Lutheran congregations had declining numbers of German-speaking congregants. For more and more of the members, English was their first language, and they preferred English services. This caused a huge rift in many places.

For instance, Doerr arrived at the tiny town of Venango in 1871 to serve Zion Evangelical Lutheran for two years. The church remained whole while Doerr was there but fractured in 1875 when a group of 65 members split off to form a competing church, 1st Lutheran. Neither church survived.

In 1897 Doerr arrived at his last pastorate in Adamsburg, Pa. and encountered the same old controversy. In 1849 “Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church of Adamsburg and Vicinity” had broken off from Brush Creek Lutheran Church of Hempfield Township over the use of English in services, with the former preferring English and the latter, German. By the time Doerr arrived, they had been recombined into a single parish served by one pastor.

Gradually, however, English prevailed. The Brush Creek Church began to grow as it introduced English into the services, and Holy Trinity declined. The last service at Holy Trinity was held on September 27, 1908, two days before Doerr suffered the stroke that would lead to his death. With the loss of its pastor, Holy Trinity dissolved. Brush Creek Lutheran Church survives at 177 Brush Creek Road on the outskirts of Irwin, Pa.

Philip Doerr and his wife, Wilhelmina, are buried in the Union Cemetery in Irwin, Pa. Their children were scattered because Philip moved around so much. But they are united in their unusual names.

Philip Melanchthon Doerr was named for the German reformation leader and Luther collaborator, Philip Melanchthon (born Philip Schwartzertd). Melanchthon is Greek for “black earth,” which is also the meaning of the German, Schwartzertd.

Luther Weddell Doerr, was obviously named for Martin Luther, and also for Rev. A. J. Weddell (1821-1896), the English Lutheran clergyman in Cumberland, Md., who was the teacher of Doerr.

Athaneous Mertz Doerr, was probably named for Athanasius, a Bishop of Alexandria in the time of Constantine, who spoke against Arianism, a non-trinitarian doctrine that was prevalent at the time.



Left: Photo of Rev. Doerr taken during his time at First Lutheran Church, Warren, Pa.

Right: Photo of Rev. Doerr found hanging in Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Delmont, Pa.

