

Early in the eighteenth century German Lutherans arrived in America, strangers in a strange land. They came from the Palatinate, were religiously inclined, devout, and sincerely desirous that their children should grow up strong in the church. No matter where they landed on the coasts of America, they eventually gravitated to Pennsylvania.

It was with a remnant of the Conestoga tribe occupying the flats along the Conestoga river that William Penn concluded a treaty which was to endure "as long as the sun should shine and the waters run into rivers." Historian Fisk says: "Pennsylvania in colonial days was the center of distribution of foreign emigrants. From here as a starting point they spread to all points south and west. Shortly after the beginning of the new century, 1700, they began to penetrate the dense forests which covered the counties of Bucks, Montgomery, Dauphin, Berks and Lancaster. When no more land remained on this side of the Susquehanna, the Germans crossed the river and founded the counties of York and Cumberland."

The inducements offered by William Penn to settlers were not confined to the right of soil and voice in government. Religious tolerance was also guaranteed. Pennsylvania thus became the refuge and home of people of all religious beliefs. Penn's law of religious liberty was one of the first in the provinces and during his life the liberty of conscience was never infringed upon. At a later date his religious adherents would have throttled toleration had they not feared revolution.

The Lutheran emigrants did not come to America to carry out a new experiment in religion. They readily merged themselves into the common life of the provinces, but held to their membership in the Lutheran Church. In general they were pietists, or Bible reading Christians. A custom inaugurated at this time and continued for many years was the purchase of a family Bible soon after a couple's wedding day. It was not an ornament in the home, but a portion of the family's daily food as they meditated upon its contents. It comforted them in danger and loneliness. They took it with them to church on the Lord's Day. As they followed the sermon they opened it, locating the scripture passages as they were cited by the pastor. The church service was both a time of worship and a period of religious instruction. The Pennsylvania German also had a hymnbook. They revered it. It was used in both the home and church. Favorite hymns were memorized. In the long winter evenings they sang the praises of God at family worship. Arndt's "Wahres Christentum" and Starke's "Gebet Buch" was their devotional literature and were in constant use. When they built their homes, they placed a pious inscription upon it to remind all of the character of the occupants. One can still read inscriptions such as:

"Gott gesegne dieses Haus  
Und alles was da gehet ein und aus."

The first services of worship were held in homes, or barns, or in the open air. The erection of the house of God followed the erection of the home. It too was built of logs. Services were held irregularly, often once in six weeks or longer. It was a joyous time when the pastor made his visits. The sick were administered to, new born babes

baptized, young people married, all kinds of advice given and news brought from other settlements. The church had no floor. The seats were made of roughly hewn planks or logs. There on a platform was a desk serving as a pulpit. The church was not heated. In winter, before the hour of service, a fire was built outside the church, where all would stand warming themselves before entering. The service was long. the Vorsaeuger led in the singing of hymns. The sermon was often two or more hours long with no objections raised. The prayer (Long Prayer) was in proportion, Church time was also a time for meeting relatives and friends and exchanging news. In thoses days there were no newspapers. News was transmitted by word of mouth.

The earliest settlements of Lutherans within the bounds of the Lancaster Conference were at Lancaster, 1730; Earltown (New Holland). 1730; Brickerville, 1730; and Muddy Creek, 1732. The congregations at Lancaster (Trinity Lutheran) and New Holland (Trinity Church) formed the nucleus of the Lancaster Conference.