

Anthony Jacob Henckel: A Brief Biography, Including
His Influence on the American Frontier.

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Church History
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April 27, 1987

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In my search for Henckel family history regarding the publishing of the first American English Book of Concord (New Market, Virginia), I came across the name of a rather interesting character in the person of Anthony Jacob Henckel, the first American Henckel and the father of the Lutheran Henckels of this country. I believe him to be worthy of consideration as one of the earliest Lutheran pastors in America as well as the father of an entire generation of Confessional Lutheran ministers in this country. It is my objective, therefore, to compile a biography of the life of Anthony Jacob Henckel, to account for the activities and ministries during his years in America and to briefly offer an opinion as to his influence on early American Lutheranism.

Anthony Jacob Henckel was born October 27, 1668 to Georg Henckel and his wife Anna Eulalia Dentzer. Anthony was the oldest of the couple's five sons, the first child being a daughter born April 19, 1667. As was the custom of the day, out of necessity, due to the high rate of infant mortality, little Anthony was baptized the very same day of his birth in Merenberg, Germany by Pastor George Anthony Reinhardi, who was also one of his godparents (Rev. Reinhardi probably agreed to be godparent, because Anthony Jacob, being the eldest son, was considered a candidate for the ministry). (Henkel, p. 25)

The existing records and histories do not provide much information concerning the Henckel home life. Georg Henckel, the father, was the headmaster of the school in Merenberg (sometimes spelled Mehrenberg). His name is always preceded by the title "Herr." This title apparently meant something more than it does today since Herr Georg Henckel seems to be the only one mentioned

in the early family records with such a title. Herr Georg Henckel died in the early part of 1678, leaving behind six children and his wife (his last son was born post-humously). Anthony Jacob at this time was only ten years old. Virtually nothing is known about Anthony Henckel's childhood. After the death of his father, his mother along with the children moved back to her childhood home in Steinberg, which is presently the village of Steinmerk. Perhaps she had family living in the area. She died in her home town in the year 1700.

Meanwhile, while living in Steinberg, on May 5, 1688 at the age of twenty, Anthony Jacob Henckel enrolled at nearby Giessen University, under Prof. Michael Heiland. In 1692, Anthony passed his examination in theology, received his diploma and graduated from the Giessen University. Upon graduating, he received his first call, by letter, to Ausweiler in the Palatinate. Apparently, for unknown reasons, he never arrived at this post. Instead, in 1692, following his examination in January, Anthony Jacob was called instead to the church at Eschelbronn. The patron, by whom he was called, was Baron John Anton of the Felz and his brother Philipp. He was ordained as pastor of Eschelbronn on February 28, 1692 by John Christopher Wildius, pastor at Hoffheim. Sometime shortly before or after his ordination, Anthony was married to Maria Elizabeth. The two had twelve children. While pastor at Eschelbronn, Anthony received an appointment to the Church at Monchzell, whose patron was the Baron John Melchior of Vestenburg (von Festenburg), after whom Anthony named one of his Sons. Anthony Henckel remained pastor at Eschelbronn and Monchzell a relatively short time. In the summer of 1695, roughly three years after his ordination at Eschelbronn, he accepted a call to

a dual pastorate at Breitenbronn and Daudenzell. Here he remained until 1714, Daudenzell being the mother church.

Assuming the post at Breitenbronn and Daudenzell marked the beginning of Pastor Henckel's problems, which eventually lead to his decision to leave Europe and to come to America. To set the stage for his clash with the Catholics at Breitenbronn, it is necessary to briefly review the history of the area of Breitenbronn. As early as 1496, the records show that the territory had come under the control of the elector of the Palatinate. As the Reformation gradually began to gather strength and influence, the area gradually became Lutheran. The Lutherans held the church until the year 1671. At this point, up until 1687, the records are cloudy. It seems that the congregation at Breitenbronn was in somewhat of a state of limbo. The Lutheran pastor, for various reasons was forbidden to preach there, but it is unclear whether or not the Catholics occupied the church. It would seem that they did not, because in 1687 they filed an objection with Elector Philip William of the Palatinate against the exclusive use of the building and revenues of the Breitenbronn church by the Lutheran pastor at Daudenzell. In short, the Elector ruled in favor of the Lutherans, as they had held the church from 1604 uninterrupted until 1671. His decree stood until 1699.

At this point, Pastor Henckel had his first clash with the Catholics. In 1699, the Catholic Commission of Religion issued a decree ordering certain Lutheran churches to share their buildings and revenues equally with the Catholics. At this, a local government office (Superior Chancery) seized the revenue of the church at Breitenbronn and held it in escrow. By means of a single letter, pointing out to the head of the Chancery that he held no

jurisdiction in this matter, Rev. Henckel succeeded in having his church and monies restored to him until 1708.

By this time, the electorate had changed hands and the Catholic Elector, John William, was in power. Again in January of 1708 the order for the simultaneous use of churches and revenues by Catholics and Lutherans was issued. Inasmuch as the Elector himself had not issued the decree, nor had he received orders from his own Lutheran Consistory, Rev. Henckel refused to yield, standing on the electoral decree of Philip William, 1687. There seems to have been a standoff in the issue, with Rev. Henckel holding the church. But in July of 1709, an Electoral order (governmental) was issued confirming the simultaneous use of the building by Lutherans and Catholics. Eventually, the Catholics, unable to obtain the key to the church, broke open the door with an axe. And so, the Lutherans and Catholics shared the building. Rev. Henckel left in 1714. Here we see the beginning of the events which caused Rev. Henckel to emigrate to America. The next elector, Charles Philip, eventually ordered the Lutherans to share the church revenues with the Catholics. No conscientious Lutheran pastor could continue his ministry under such circumstances.

From Daudenzell-Breitnebronn, Henckel once again was appointed to the post at Monchzell in 1714 where he remained only a short while. At this time, he moved on to serve at Neckargemund where he remained until June of 1717. While serving at these parishes, Rev. Henckel again was involved in two situations which further strengthened his resolve to come to America.

The first incident had to do with his patron Baron von Festenburg and immediately preceded Henckel's departure for America. The other incident is simply another bout with the Catholics,

while he was pastor at Neckargemund, which he also lost. The incident with von Festenburg, however, merits further discussion. It seems that this was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back and, as I said earlier, sent Rev. Henckel packing his bags for the New World.

It seems that upon his arrival at the pastorate at Monchzell, Henckel found the church in a bad state. This, he found out, was due to the oppression of Baron von Festenburg. Von Festenburg had confiscated the church lands, from which the income for the pastor was to come, and was using them for his own purposes. Meanwhile, he had the pastor of the church at Eschelbronn serving the people of Monchzell. Services were held irregularly and instruction of the youth had not gone on in eighteen years. Upon finding the situation untenable, Rev. Henckel registered a complaint with von Festenburg's superior, Prince Ernest Ludwig of Hesse. (After which von Festenburg dismissed Henckel from his post). After repeated correspondence with von Festenburg, none of which was shared with Henckel, and without any further investigation into the matter, he ruled in favor of von Festenburg on July 29, 1717. In all probability, Rev. Henckel had already departed for America before this ruling. This may explain Ludwig's reluctance to investigate the matter further. (The matter was, however, later resolved and Henckel was shown to be in the right.) (Henckel, pp. 450-465).

As I said earlier, the Rev. Henckel set sail for America sometime in June of 1717. He arrived in this country in September of that same year "as an exile." (Wentz, p. 48) This is established by a record of Henry Melchior Muehlenberg. In 1762, Rev. Henckel's

son-in-law died. Muehlenberg conducted the funeral and wrote the obituary stating that the deceased had come with his father-in-law, Rev. Henckel, to America and had lived in Pennsylvania for forty-five years, so establishing Rev. Henckel's arrival in 1717.

The records are scarce concerning Henckel's activities in America, perhaps because the church was newly organizing. After landing in New York, Rev. Henckel, along with his large family, made his way to New Hanover (Falkner's Swamp), where Daniel Falkner had earlier begun the first German Lutheran congregation in Pennsylvania. (Qualben, p. 200) Falkner ~~died~~^{left} in 1708 and Henckel arrived here in 1717. Early in the Spring of 1718, Henckel bought a parcel of land and settled down. This was the beginning of his ministry in America; a ministry which, perhaps, touched more lives than any before it. Henckel used Falkner's Swamp as a headquarters for his work in the area. Neve says, "He made Falkner's Swamp his residence, reviving church activity there and ministering to congregations and families in all the surrounding territory." (Neve, p. 48) The importance of Rev. Henckel's ministry to the people at Falkner's Swamp must have been tremendous to them. They had been without the services of a regular pastor since the ~~death~~^{departure} of Falkner himself nine years prior. The first church (probably a log church, built in 1704) had virtually fallen into ruins. But by 1719, Rev. Henckel had erected a new church on land donated by one of his parishioners. (Henckel, pg. 276)

To say that the early settlers at New Hanover had a regular minister in Anthony Henckel would be a misrepresentation. Henckel's headquarters were at New Hanover, but he served everyone he could reach. Neve says, "He did vigorous pioneer work until his death in 1778." (Neve, pg. 48) Finck describes Henckel and his

ministry in this way: "He was a man of great physical strength, six feet tall, bold and courageous, true to the principle of his Church and full of missionary zeal." (Finck, pg. 97) Furthermore, he writes of Henckel's travels: "He is supposed to have traveled on horseback to the Germans in Virginia, and is known to have visited all the German settlements within reach of his home in New Hanover. One such place was a settlement known as Schipback where Henckel found himself in the midst of an argument between two Reformed ministers. Another such settlement was that of Tulpehocken. Here Henckel visited on several occasions and encouraged the people to build a church, which they did in 1727. Again we see the effect that Rev. Henckel had on the Lutheran Church of his day. He seems to have been responsible either directly or indirectly for the building of several churches. Again, this would tend to establish a group of Lutherans more firmly and create places for the next generation of pastors to conduct a more local ministry. Missionary preachers like Henckel tended to do the spadework for generations to come. They established the foundation on which others could later build, making the work of future generations of pastors in America much easier.

Two other places that Rev. Henckel occasionally served were Germantown and Philadelphia. Qualben is of the opinion that Henckel founded these churches: "...it is likely that he was the founder of the Lutheran congregations at Philadelphia and Germantown." (Qualben, pg. 201) With his reputation for organizing Lutherans and encouraging them to build churches and form congregations, it is likely that Henckel was at least instrumental in the establishing of these two congregations if not the founder. Most historians

agree with this assessment.

It's difficult to enumerate every place that Rev. Henckel touched in his eleven years on the frontier. It is certain that he visited the Germans as far off as Virginia. But in those days on the frontier, there were many scattered groups of German Lutherans. If it were not for men like Henckel and Falkner, many or most of these people would have gone totally without any spiritual care. Serving these frontier people was difficult work. But the work was important in the fact that the frontier minister helped to stabilize the villages and communities and even small groups of families settled together. He helped to organize and solidify settlements as permanent communities by encouraging the building of churches and schools. The frontier pastor indeed played a role in the country's advancement westward as well as being the only means of soul conservation on the frontier. Anthony Jacob Henckel was such a dedicated individual who made his contribution through his faithful service.

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Perhaps his most important contribution to American Lutheranism was simply the fact that he came with his family which continued to make many contributions to Lutheranism in this country. Rev. Henckel's own children were active in the church. His great grandson, Rev. Paul Henckel had five sons who became Lutheran ministers. Rev. Paul Henckel himself is described by Finck as "the greatest Home Missionary of the Lutheran Church after the Revolution." Two of Paul Henckel's sons established a publishing house at New Market, Virginia. Here the first American-English Book of Concord was published. Many other relatives could be mentioned as being active in American Lutheranism. It is sufficient to say that Anthony Henckel had a lasting influence on American Lutheranism.

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His death occurred on a return trip from one of his visits to Germantown and Philadelphia. While on his way home he fell from his horse and suffered a fatal injury. He died at the age of sixty-five.