

# **CENTRE COUNTY HISTORY: SOME THOUGHTS**

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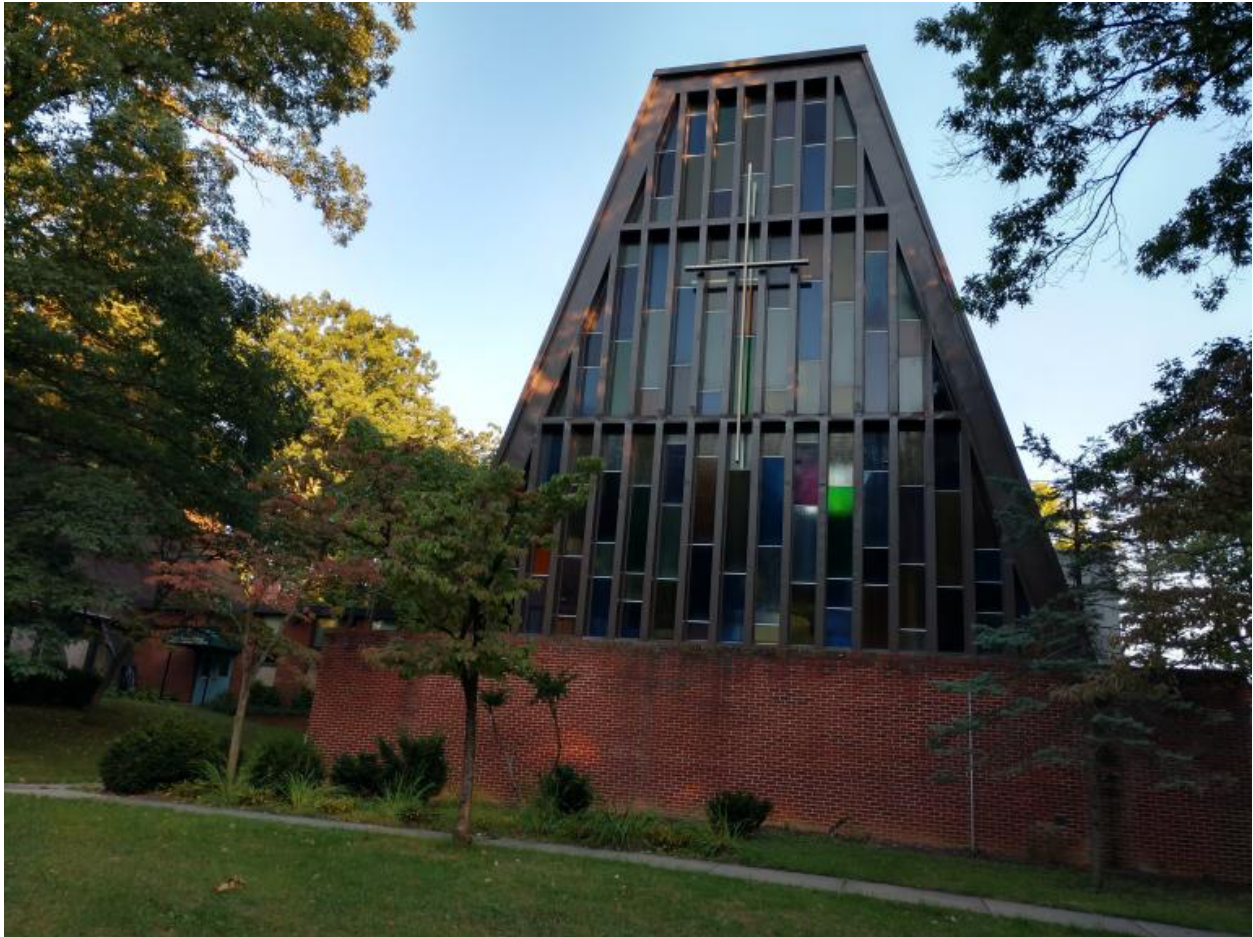
What follows is a series of five blogposts I did in 2020 on the Anxious Bench site, mainly focused on aspects of the history of religion and churches in Centre County, Pennsylvania. This document makes no attempt whatever to be vaguely comprehensive about the region's larger history.

Throughout, all photos and images are either my own work, or else are public domain.

## LOSING THE BRETHREN

Over time, denominations and churches rise and fall, and mergers and acquisitions are a recurring theme of American religious history. We can argue at length about the social or spiritual impact of such changes, but losing those labels has a bad effect on the popular awareness of history – ethnic and political as well as religious. We lose a sense of the diversity of that religious history. I keep coming back to Martin Marty's wise dictum that "Ethnicity is the skeleton of American religion."

As a random example, I choose a church that stands in an area I know well, in [State College, Pennsylvania](#). To the best of my knowledge, this Park Forest church is a flourishing congregation with an excellent range of ministries and programs. As its sign proclaims, [it is a United Methodist church](#), and nothing obviously contradicts that title. The architecture proclaims its roots in the 1960s, specifically 1967, and it stands in what was at the time a new suburban development. It did not replace any older structure on the site.



*Photograph is my own work*

But let me turn again to that denominational title. Most non-historian passers-by would see the Methodist label and if they know anything at all about the Christian past, they might venture something like “Wesley, right?” But when this church was built, it looked to a whole different

history, and a very rich one, one that is pretty much forgotten. When completed in 1967, with its then ultra-modern look, this was a church of the EUB, [Evangelical United Brethren](#), not the Methodists. Um, so what exactly were they, and what happened to them? It's a powerful story.

### *Why Denominations Matter*

I know, of course, that denominational identities are not that strong in modern America, and they have been fading steadily for years. The reason why people belong to particular denominations are complex, but have little to do with the history or theology of those traditions. People attend Church X because that is what their family has always done, or because their friends go there, or they generally like the style of worship, or the pastor, or the kind of music, or (maybe most important) they love the programs for children and youth. In each case, what matters is what happens in the given congregation, not at the church's national or global level, which is why so few ordinary churchgoers get disturbed at the startling or actively deranged policy statements that regularly emanate from national headquarters.

If you talk to smart or educated people attending Church X, you may be taken aback by how little even they know of what makes that denomination distinctive, or what its positions actually are on matters of faith or practice. In religious terms, Americans are a very small-c congregationalist people (and that comment applies to Catholics far more than many might care to admit).

I'm not naïve about how much denominations and brands matter. But they do have a lot to tell us, and losing those narratives is tragic. Even as basic a matter as why particular denominations end up concentrated in certain areas is of real significance. On the eighth day of Creation, God did not add that, by the way, there would be Unitarians in New England, Lutherans in Minnesota, and Baptists in Georgia. In each case, there is a real story behind those distributions, and how they have developed over time. It tells us about ethnicity, class, race, migration, and a host of other key historical factors.

### *We Are Brothers*

So what was the EUB? As we know, the eighteenth century was marked by a powerful religious revival across the Atlantic world, and Europe. In the English-speaking world, the key figures were the Wesleys and Whitefield, but German America had its own distinct movements, and some once-famous leaders.

Some background is helpful here. The Germans who poured into Pennsylvania and neighboring states in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were deeply divided between two main religious wings or currents, and relations between the two could be frosty. The church people, Lutheran or Reformed, belonged to denominations that enjoyed state support and establishment back in their homelands, and these constituted the large majority of the settlers. There were also the more celebrated sect people, the Mennonites, Amish, and Dunkers, together with really some marginal groups. The sect people had bitter memories of recent persecution by the established churches back in Germany or Switzerland.

The revival movements of the mid-eighteenth century divided all the churches and sects, between enthusiasts and conservatives. Three key leaders stood out among the German revivalists: [Philip](#)

[William Otterbein](#) (Reformed) and [Martin Boehm](#) (Mennonite), and from a younger generation, [Jacob Albright](#) (Lutheran). Although one was "sect" and one "church," Boehm and Otterbein both became powerful preachers in their own right, and in a celebrated Great Meeting in Lancaster County in 1767, they agreed that despite all those glaring church-sect differences, "We are brothers," "Wir sind Brüder." The two leaders were close to the Anglophone Methodists, and Otterbein was friendly with Francis Asbury, but cultural and linguistic differences kept the movements separate.

That "brothers" phrase inspired the denomination that was formally established in 1800, the [United Brethren in Christ](#) (UB). This has me thinking, but Wikipedia states that this was "the first American denomination that was not transplanted from Europe." Hmm, can that be right? In the 1790s, meanwhile, Jacob Albrecht or Albright evangelized the German-speakers of south-eastern Pennsylvania, and attracted many followers. "Albright's People" (*Die Albrechtsleute*) became the [Evangelical Association](#) or Evangelical Church in 1816. From its early days, the Evangelical Church and the UB sporadically discussed formal merger, but nothing came of it.

In 1889, the United Brethren split into two churches, [each claiming the original name](#). This was in no sense a marginal tradition, as it had a national and international span. In 1906, the majority UB wing had a membership of 274,000, with a global missionary outreach, and a chain of colleges and seminaries. In 1946, that majority UB faction finally merged with the Evangelical Church to form the Evangelical United Brethren, EUB. That merger generated real controversy over women's ordination and clergy rights, of a kind that might appear surprising for that period. The UB had ordained women elders since the 1880s, while the Evangelicals were far more conservative. The new merged church did not ordain women.

The present situation [dates from 1968](#), when the EUB (then 750,000 strong) joined the Methodists to form the United Methodist Church, and older congregations were subsumed under that denomination.

### *The Age of Unions*

That merger is representative of a much larger story of church unions and alliances in the mid-twentieth century, and it tells us as much about ethnicity and language as it does about theology. Originally, the German-oriented churches were separate from mainstream Methodism because of language and culture, but over time, the distinctions separating the various ethnic churches from the mainstream faded, as the regular use of non-English languages declined steeply. The reasons justifying continued ecclesiastical separation faded, especially among younger believers and clergy.

This is part of the larger phenomenon of how America's various white ethnic and immigrant groups came to share a common identity, which was White, Anglophone, and Protestant, if not actually Anglo-Saxon – WAP if not WASP. This is related to the growing assimilation of immigrant populations into a new shared Whiteness, a movement that was rapidly accelerated by common participation in the two World Wars. Obviously, at every stage, African-Americans were part of a distinct and often segregated narrative.

### *Pennsylvania Realities*



Evangelical, UB, and EUB churches were common in Central Pennsylvania. In State College, the Evangelical Church began an impressive downtown church in 1915 to cater to a burgeoning new college community: it was completed in 1921. That in turn joined the new EUB, which in 1967 spawned its new suburban offshoot, as I have already mentioned. That must have been one of the last new structures erected by the denomination. The 1967 date was significant as the bicentennial of that fraternal Great Meeting back in 1767. The old downtown State College church preserves some memory of its founder through its name, the [Albright-Bethune Church](#). But the suburban church really does not cite its EUB roots, and you have to work to find them.



Losing the memory of those older denominations involves real amnesia about the country's religious past, as well as forgetting some important figures in American religious history. Of course, the story is open to anyone who cares to dig, but I suspect not many try.

Nor is this issue confined to the Methodists or its various contributory strands. Just walk around any American city or mid-size town and look at the informative foundation stones of those older stone and brick churches from the era between (say) 1870 and 1960. See how many began as something other than the Baptist or ELCA or UCC churches that they are today. Look how many once-mighty older denominations have been all but forgotten in the same way as the EUB. In a society that spends so much time and effort pursuing the ancestry and genealogy of families and individuals, little attention is paid to investigating the precursors of churches.

This is absolutely no criticism of any particular church or congregation. Now more than ever, they would probably tell you that they have more pressing demands on their time and resources than to commemorate bygone days. But may I suggest that a bit of that lost denominational history might at least feature on their websites, if not on actual physical signage?

*"Ecumenism demands amnesia"* (Discuss).

## IN SEARCH OF GHOST DENOMINATIONS

Last time, I posted about the range of [older "ghost" denominations and churches](#) that preceded the specific church building you see before you. Think of them as the underlying substrata. If you know anything about denominations and their development, that opens the door to understanding a remarkable amount of the history of local areas, whether you are looking at issues of politics, class or, above all, ethnicity. That is true of rural areas and small towns, but also of large and medium size cities. With a little background, you can use churches to read a social landscape.

In giving an example, I have to be specific, as all American religious history is in a sense local. Let me talk about [an area I know well, in Pennsylvania](#). In older communities, the pioneering churches (from the early or mid-nineteenth century) commonly belong to what today we would call three denominations, namely Presbyterian, Lutheran, and [United Church of Christ, UCC](#), with Methodists not long afterwards. Often, the Lutheran and UCC buildings stand surprisingly close to each other, often on the same block, or just across the street.



So why those original three? The Presbyterians are easy to understand, as the founding white settlements here were Protestant Irish or Scotch-Irish, and that meant Presbyterian. But the other two are a separate story, which I tell to indicate just how complex is the background underlying the religious landscape we might take for granted.

That Lutheran/UCC mix reflects German-American origins, and it actually involves two traditions, namely the Lutheran and Reformed. The story begins with the Reformed (Calvinists) who were well represented among the [German settlers of Pennsylvania](#) in the eighteenth century. At the end of that century, we hear of ministers settling at Reformed churches in what were then the border territories in the center and west of the state. Germans continued to flood into the state in the early nineteenth century, but when they arrived, they came from a distinctive political/religious set up in their homelands. German states had both Lutheran and Reformed churches. During the Napoleonic wars, the Prussian state acquired other German regions with a diversity of denominations, and in 1817 the king decreed a [Lutheran-Reformed union](#) in his territories. Some resisted, but the union remained in place for decades.

Many of the German Protestants who arrived in Pennsylvania were either Lutheran or Reformed by tradition, but they duly established Union churches to serve both strands, sometimes with respective ministers officiating in different weeks. After a while, when settlements prospered, the two sides separated into their component parts, and they built two churches where one had been – one Lutheran, one Reformed. Usually, these were prosperous communities, and the new churches were very handsome indeed. That situation lasted for over a century, during which the Lutheran and Reformed churches were the real mainline in those Pennsylvania villages and cities. [Brenda Gaydosh](#) has a very readable account of the church's history in the state.

Reformed believers of German or Swiss heritage were mainly concentrated in the [Reformed Church in the United States](#), and the [Evangelical Synod of North America](#). In 1926, the Lutheran Church was "the largest Protestant body in Pennsylvania with 551,000 members. The Reformed Church retained 216,000 members, ranking fifth behind Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists." Beyond Pennsylvania, those German Reformed believers were widely found across Ohio and the Midwest, and into the upland South. The Evangelical Synod found its heart in Missouri and Illinois, where its twentieth century celebrities included Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr.



The German Reformed tradition was very active [intellectually and spiritually](#):

*The newly independent German Reformed Church, short of pastors and threatened by a revivalist gospel, established a seminary in 1825, at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, that moved in 1829 to York, in 1837 to Mercersburg and finally to Lancaster in 1871, where it became Lancaster Theological Seminary. Franklin College (1787) of Lancaster, jointly supported by the Lutherans and the Reformed, in 1853 merged with German Reformed Marshall College to form Franklin and Marshall College.*

Scholar [Philip Schaff](#) was "the most outstanding church historian in 19th century America, and the primary mediator of German theology to America." If you ever work on early church history or patristics, and you use the terrific Internet resources of the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#), [CCEL](#), you will come to appreciate Schaff's scholarship very highly.

Like other Protestants, the [German Reformed](#) were split over issues of revivalism, and ministers like [Philip Otterbein](#) followed the revivalist example set by people like the Wesleys. In the nineteenth century, Reformed conservatives favored the more liturgical-oriented traditions stemming from the



[seminary at Mercersburg](#), and the work of [Philip Schaff](#) and [John Nevin](#). This Mercersburg Theology was the German-American equivalent of the Oxford Movement in the Anglican and Episcopal churches, and like that movement, it inspired a lot of controversy, not to mention some real bile.



For obvious reasons, many "German Reformed" churches changed their signage in 1917 or thereabouts, to avert anti-German feeling during the First World War.

Matters changed in the mid-twentieth century with a series of new mergers and unions. In 1934, the Reformed Church and the Evangelical Synod merged to become the Evangelical and Reformed Church (E&R). In 1957, the E&R merged with the New England Congregational churches to found the UCC. Hence, all those small Pennsylvania towns acquired the now familiar mix of Lutheran and UCC, usually as close neighbors. In New England, UCC churches usually stem from Congregational roots.

Quite separate from the German story, Dutch Reformed believers meanwhile formed the unrelated [Reformed Church in America](#). Others joined the Christian Reformed Church, best known perhaps for its association with Calvin University.

For the UCC, the new situation reflected more than new signage. The UCC quickly became one of the most liberal of denominations, and visiting a UCC church in Pennsylvania today can mean encountering a curious and even mysterious mashup of traditions and images. The building suggests a very "churchy" and traditional model of religion, but it may well be flying flags and banners celebrating LGBT or Trans causes, or social justice slogans. They are [Open and Affirming](#). You



might wonder how such very liberal and seemingly urban symbols ended up in small town or rural areas; but if you understand the history, you'll immediately see why.

Not surprisingly, at least some rural churches [have recently left the UCC on political grounds](#), but I have little sense [how large that phenomenon is](#). For multiple reasons, not just ideological, the UCC is in deep trouble, and its membership rolls have collapsed dramatically even by the standards of the Protestant mainline denominations.



If you want a sad visual symbol of the loss of the once-mighty German Reformed churches that so flourished in the nineteenth century, in major cities as well as villages, see these grim images of the [old First Reformed church in Cincinnati](#). What a fall was here.

As I say, the German Reformed and their various associates constitute one example, or rather one group of examples. But when you see a church sign citing a familiar denominational label like “Methodist” or “UCC,” it often pays to dig further and see how those names got there. That digging

can often generate some interesting stories. I actually wonder if you went to one of those older Pennsylvania towns and asked if there had ever been a Reformed church around there, whether anyone would know. I suspect not. "That church over there? Oh no, that's always been UCC." But trust me, if you know the American religious scene, then the Reformed really mattered, and could have been a contender.

The moral again: if you want to understand a church, it pays to read the foundation stone. Denominational ghosts might be lurking there.

I can't resist citing the title of the publication in which John Nevin attacked those obnoxious revivalists. It was [\*The Anxious Bench - A Tract for the Times\*](#) (Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1843), What a great name that would make for a blog.

In his second 1844 edition, Nevin noted the furious response that his original tract had received:

*At least half a dozen of replies to it, shorter or longer, have been announced in different quarters, proceeding from no less than five different religious denominations. Various assaults, in addition to this, have been made upon it, from the pulpit ; to say nothing of the innumerable reproaches it has been required to suffer, in a more private way.*

Thank heavens our own modern-day Anxious Bench does not venture into areas of sensitive debate.

## READING CHURCHES AND READING AMERICAN HISTORY

This is another in my series of [posts on "reading" churches and their denominations](#) to find what they can tell you about local history, [with a strong emphasis on ethnicity](#).

When I was growing up in Wales, churches supplied me with a very large part of my education. These were the long lost days [before the dark times](#), before the insurance companies ordered local churches to stay locked always when unsupervised, and generally outside regular service times. In consequence, you could then enter pretty much any medieval church any time, and learn an immense amount about its history, as well as its art, sculpture, architecture, and design, often encountering objects and images of the highest aesthetic quality. All the while, usually, having the place to yourself. On a good day, a substantial church-crawl might take in three or four really old buildings and church-yards. So surely, you can't compare the lesson to be learned from a thirteenth century British parish church with what you might find in a small village site in Pennsylvania? No – but you can learn lots of different things.

I live part of my life in central Pennsylvania, where I have spent rather more time than I expected recently in light of the pandemic. Based in the university town of State College, I often explore the country areas located just a couple of miles outside town, but which are nevertheless very rural indeed.

*Q: How rural are they?*

*A: The posters about social distancing advise you to stay at least one cow's length apart. Or two calves. Really.*

Every small town and village has a couple of quite imposing older churches, often dating back to the early or mid-nineteenth century. In my particular area, European settlement began only around the Revolutionary War, and not much is visible from before 1800 or so, but there was then a major building boom through the first half of the century. Based on a great deal of local church-crawling, I offer the following very general guidelines for wider application.

### *Everything is Local*

The first point is that religious history is strictly local, and the specific things I am observing and describing would not necessarily apply to other parts of Pennsylvania, to the Western or Northeastern industrial areas of the state, nor to other rural regions. And as to other states, Good heavens... The principles apply, but the details of economics and ethnicity and immigration and denominations vary enormously within just a few miles. That does not mean that findings in this part of Pennsylvania don't have wider application, and some can be extended across the country, in cities as well as villages. You just have to be very careful about the details. Nuance is all, and the devil is in the denominations... I can't believe I said that.

As I described in an earlier post, American religion is highly congregational in tone, but denominations still matter as badges of ethnicity and class, at least as much as theology or social teaching. My personal map of this particular area notes denominations as key markers. Where there are Presbyterians, there were Scotch-Irish, very likely arrivals from the years between 1770 and 1830. Germans – Lutheran and Reformed – are the next generation, and on through the nineteenth century. Some of those statements might sound surprising if you are used to old-established denominations as being fundamental and inevitable parts of the denominational reality. I have a different perspective, as I don't believe I ever saw a Lutheran church (for instance) in the UK. There might have been a couple in seaports, to service Scandinavian crews and visitors. Pennsylvania was my first lived introduction to German realities, and they are everywhere.

### *Moving On Up*

People build churches as expressions of community, and as communities change, so religious buildings alter and evolve. If you date religious buildings with fair accuracy, you can see new social groups emerging, and others vanishing. In the areas of my observation, the basic realities fit the four foundational groups – Presbyterian, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist. When you see other groups, you can be pretty sure that they arrived to fill some later niche. See the Roman Catholic church for the rise of industrial populations, often the groups building the canals or railroads, or working in the mills. That's not entirely true, as you can find German Catholics settling as farmers and merchants but they are rarer. Then, a bit later, you find Episcopalians settling, as a town acquires some social pretensions, and some professional prosperity. Like I say, the picture would be different elsewhere, for instance in New England or Maryland, but those are different ecclesiastical planets from Pennsylvania.

As a town booms on the basis of some form of industrial or commercial wealth, so the old established churches rebuild, often on a very impressive scale. Tell me the denominations, and I will show you where the lawyers, merchants, professionals, and mill owners went to pray. In many or most older towns, the churches follow a similar pattern, arranged in rows along a block or two, with a very predictable range of denominations. Sometimes the Catholics are in the same region,

sometimes they are a few blocks away, literally across the tracks. If there is a Black church, usually AME, it will be located discreetly and humbly.

Right in the middle of those Protestant mainliners, you will pretty much always find the Masonic lodge, usually built on a scale very comparable to the grandest Presbyterian or Methodist quasi-cathedrals. Some people might try to write the history of mainline churches in the US before the 1960s without taking account of the Freemasons, but it is a fool's game. Except for Catholics, always assume that the leading local clergy were Masons, and that is true across the country.

### *The Great Rebuilding*

The better you know the roots of those mainline churches, the appearance of many of those buildings should surprise. Many originated in Reformation struggles where visual or material symbols of faith were deeply controversial. As large stone churches proliferated in the nineteenth century, and denominations frankly competed to produce the most impressive buildings, so they used a standard range of decoration, following standard architectural guides. Hence Presbyterians and Reformed found no obvious problem in very classically "churchy" products with stained glass windows and sculptures, even with angels and stone crosses. The reactions of their iconoclastic ancestors to such innovations are not recorded. The fact that we don't find such things startling is testimony to how thoroughly those once "High" styles and customs were mainlined and normalized.

Looking at a stately neo-medieval church in a midsize town, it is very difficult indeed to locate it according to denomination. As a case in point, I offer a handsome church of the sort that you might find in any American town or city from the era between 1870 and 1940. This particular example is located in State College, and it dates from 1913. But what is it by denomination? You could easily believe Episcopal, or Methodist, or Lutheran, or even Catholic. [It is actually Presbyterian](#), specifically PCUSA, although no architectural indicator points to that fact.



Here is what I consider a lovely church in a smaller Pennsylvania community, namely Centre Hall. In this case, the architecture might give away its German origins, and it was originally German Reformed (it is now UCC). But with its medieval reminiscences, it could easily belong to any of the other mainliners.





Or how about another very pretty medieval imitation, drawing on fourteenth century English Gothic style, complete with stained glass windows? This one was also Reformed, but is now UCC.



Without any empirical evidence whatever, I offer the suggestion that sharing common styles of church appearance contributed to reducing denominational hostilities and contention, and in the twentieth century, promoting a sense of a common mainline identity. It certainly took a lot of the old debates about images off the table.

*The Only Constant is Change*

The buildings you see often did not begin with that particular affiliation. Changes at national level have their impact. I have already written about how denominations change over time, so that a German Reformed church (say) became a United Church of Christ institution in the 1950s, usually with little trace of that in the signage. If you didn't know that history, you would not be able to find out by simply looking. Sometimes a foundation stone allows you to trace the story, but you have to get used to older labels and acronyms. "M.E.," for instance, signifies Methodist Episcopal.

As communities get wealthier and move on up, so buildings change ownership in ways that can confuse. A congregation expands beyond its original building, or develops higher aspirations, and builds a grander new facility. But the older church building survives and is sold to some other group, so that one historic building can pass through multiple hands. As a case in point, I was looking at one grand UCC church that I knew had previously been Reformed, but was baffled why it had no confirming foundation stone. Then the reality struck. It was built as a Presbyterian church, which the congregation occupied for a few years, before their aspirations grew even higher and they relocated yet again. When the Reformed moved in, they must have purged that foundation inscription, perhaps as part of a general remodeling.

In more modern times, the move away from historic structures is driven by factors other than growing wealth. It usually reflects demographic factors as the congregation moves out to the suburbs, while the search for adequate parking for cars inspires new building in the suburbs. Historic buildings can then face several fates, from simple ruin to redevelopment in some other form, as

private homes or artists' studios or community centers. But many continue the sequence of passing to new and rising denominations.

Sometimes, those transitions produce startling results, and I know of cases where really venerable nineteenth century buildings have been acquired by very modern Pentecostal denominations, producing something of a culture clash. One example I cherish involved a very impressive village church of Victorian date where the new Pentecostal owners had put up a sign proclaiming "Established 33 AD", causing near-road accidents as startled passers-by wondered about improbably early Christian missionary endeavors to Central Pennsylvania.



As a less subversive image, I offer this photograph of what was a historic Methodist church in a small village. You would be unlikely to guess that today it is Seventh Day Adventist, a fine denomination but not one usually associated with anything like this kind of architecture.

From my own professional work, I love seeing these processes continue, as old and fading churches with seriously aging congregations revive almost overnight as they initially share space with some

new immigrant group. In recent years, the old urban churches have sprouted a lot of Korean signage, not to mention Chinese, Spanish, and so many other languages. Neatly reproducing the older lessons, you can with a little effort trace the origins of those newer congregations with some precision. In the nineteenth century, the newcomers were often not “German” but rather came from some particular region or principality, with its own traditions, which remained alive in the new country for a generation or two. Today, Latino congregations can be no less diverse internally, and it pays to learn something about the map of Mexico (say). As with the German precedents, follow the food on offer and it will usually point you in the right direction.

### *Of Things Not Seen*

I have talked about the main denominations that you see, but scarcely less informative are those that you *don't* encounter in particular areas. Some might surprise outsiders. In the area of Central Pennsylvania I am describing, Baptists often do not appear in that early stratum of congregations, and were later additions. In areas where the Germans and Scotch-Irish so predominated, the Baptist presence was often imported by later English industrial migrants, and mainly confined to regions near mines, mills, or ironworks.

Many years ago a popular British humor book advised readers how to bluff their way through difficult social situations. If you ever caught out making a sweeping but false statement about a particular country, the book advised that you instantly agree with the person challenging or contradicting you, but you should nod sagely and add “Ah yes, it’s different in the south.” Needless to say, I would never play such a dishonest trick myself (although the saving tactic does indeed work wonders) but that maxim wholly applies to studying American churches and denominations. Much or most of what I am saying here is different in the south.

Some things apply, especially about the grand historic churches clustering in select streets of small or midsize towns. But the weakness or absence of Baptists marks a critical difference, and the communities I am describing very rarely have anything like the palatial “First Baptist” edifices that are such a stunning part of the architectural landscape across much of the South. That picture changes somewhat when you wander into the suburban developments and see the newer constructions, where Baptists stand alongside Pentecostal and non-denominational structures. But that just is not true in most of the older areas.

To return to my point about the localism of American religion. If you wander Texas, you will everywhere observe those two mighty and widespread groupings, Baptists (of countless shades) and Churches of Christ. Realities are very different indeed in the North-east and Midwest.

### *Forward to the Past*

Beyond Baptists, other omissions will also strike in the Pennsylvania areas I am talking about. So a familiar stereotype links Pennsylvania history with Germans, and surely, that means Amish and other sectarian groups, such as Mennonites and Dunkers. Well, yes you can find such older churches, but you have to look further afield in the countryside. One historical lesson you learn early about that immigration history is that the vast majority of newly arriving Germans were Christian and Protestant, but belonged to one of the two great institutional strands, the Lutheran or Reformed. They were “church people,” with the “sect people” a small if visible minority.

All of which brings me to small oddity. If you live in the classic college town of State College, it is a very modern community with few surviving older remains, apart from the churches. But travel twenty or thirty miles and you are deep in an Amish countryside that looks like 1850. Such a contrast between modern town and older countryside is familiar in Europe, but here there is a special story. However archaic they may seem, at least some of those Amish communities are very recent arrivals in this region, as new migrants have built upon small older settlements. Of course Amish families prospered in familiar landscapes like Lancaster County, where they prospered, but they wearied of all the traffic and tourism. In recent decades many set up or expanded colonies in the center of the state, and these continue to expand. In this region at least, the future looks ever more medieval.



## THE SLAVES OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

Through the years, I have worked a good deal on Pennsylvania history, having taught for many centuries at Penn State University. I also spent this past Summer in that state. This post is about an unexpected aspect of that history, and one with wider implications, particularly in matters of race and slavery. Briefly, even this rural northern territory had far more of a slavery history than most specialists would imagine, but that story has been all but forgotten. In that, the region offers a microcosm of larger American realities, especially above the Mason-Dixon line. It really affects how we tell the story of colonial and early national America, and especially its churches.

### *General Potter's Empire*

By way of background, Penn State University is based in State College, in Centre County. Penn State dates from humble origins in 1855, but white settlement in the county began a century before that, in the 1750s. Reputedly, Irish-born land speculator and politician [James Potter](#) (1729-89) climbed Nittany Mountain to look over Penn's Valley. "Seeing the prairies and noble forest beneath him, cried out to his attendant, 'By heavens, Thompson, I have discovered an empire!' " Like Potter, the earliest settlers were [Irish Protestants](#), and the distribution of early Presbyterian churches maps those early colonies. Ulster-derived place-names litter the countryside of Central and Western Pennsylvania – Armagh, Tyrone, Derry, Antrim, Fermanagh, McAlevy's Fort, and so on. The settlers suffered disasters during the Revolution, and the decade following 1778 is known as the Great Runaway. But settlement recommenced again from the 1780s, by the Scotch-Irish, and later by Germans.

James Potter himself ended up as a Revolutionary War brigadier-general, and in 1781-82 he was the vice president of Pennsylvania. He came to own much of what became Centre County, making him one of Pennsylvania's largest landowners. He is marked in the local landscape by Potter County, Potter Township, Potter's Fort, and Potter's Mills. At Old Fort, near the beautiful town of Centre Hall, a plaque commemorates him:

*Potter's Fort: Built 1777 by Gen. James Potter. A stockaded fort refuge for the settlers of the valley region. The site is on the nearby rise.*

This Penn's Valley area flourished and prospered. In the 1780s, Philadelphia speculator Aaron Levy laid out the nearby town of Aaronsburg on a grand scale in the hope that it would become the state capital.

At the end of the century, Central Pennsylvania became a vital center [for the charcoal iron-making industry](#):

*In the spring of 1792, Centre Furnace ... went into blast and became the first major operation in what was then Northumberland and Mifflin Counties. When Centre County was formed in 1800, it was named for Centre Furnace. Other businesses quickly followed and by 1850, the "Juniata Iron Region" boasted 48 furnaces and 42 forges.*

Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, the thriving urban center of the region was Bellefonte, while the later State College was still farmland. In the 1850s, one of those iron-masters,

[James Irvin](#) of Centre Furnace, was the principal sponsor of Penn State University, originally known as the Farmers' High School.

### *Daphne's World*

So much is familiar to local historians, or to anyone studying the prehistory of Penn State. But there is another angle that is not well known, namely that all or nearly all those key [early settlers and iron-masters owned slaves](#).

Back in Pennsylvania's founding days of the 1680s, even Quaker William Penn used slaves to work his estate. The colony as a whole had five thousand slaves in the 1720s, rising to ten thousand in the mid-1750s, and then peaked dramatically during the French and Indian War period, around 1759-65, when slavery became a familiar part of Philadelphia life. Most of those slaves came not directly from Africa, but via the Caribbean colonies. And these were the very years that white colonists were first venturing into Central Pennsylvania.

The Centre region first comes into focus in 1775 when Virginia Presbyterian minister [Philip Fithian](#) traveled through the border country, especially the Scotch-Irish communities. In the whole of Penn's Valley, he found just 28 families, nearly all Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. Naturally, he was hosted by James Potter, near Centre Hall. When he woke on an August Sunday, he "rose early, before any in the family, except a negro girl." She was probably called Daphne, and she was a slave.

When Potter's will was proved in 1789, he left a lot of property, mainly in fertile land, but with several slaves:

*He owned twelve hundred acres of land in a body surrounding the Old Fort Hotel, which he willed to his son James, ... and one hundred acres of the John McConnell warrantee, to include the mill-seat and mills erected thereon, etc., his sword, riding furniture, his negro man Hero, and mulatto man Bob.....*

*Gen. Potter owned contiguous tracts of land in a continuous stretch from Earlytown down to within a mile of Spring Mills, varying in width from a mile to a mile and one-half wide, a distance of about seven miles. The middle portion of this he willed inter alia to his daughter Martha, wife of Hon. [Andrew Gregg](#), and the easterly portion, next to Spring Mills tract, to Mary Reynolds, wife of James Riddles. To Mrs. Gregg he gave his negro slave Daphne, and Daphne's daughter Sal and son Bob.*

Slaves were property just as much as the riding equipment.

Andrew Gregg, by the way, served as US Senator from Pennsylvania from 1807 to 1813.

Slaves are frequently mentioned in passing in settlement narratives, and early tax records, but blink and you will miss them. One [unusually frank local history](#) is exactly accurate when it talks of General Potter "selling tracts to Scots-Irish settlers coming with their slaves from the south through the Seven Mountains." When the extended McNitt family entered Armagh and Potter Townships in the 1770s (note all those Ulster names), they brought a black slave.

The first white settlers of remote Curtin Township in the 1790s were two brothers from Maryland:

*Both young and ambitious, and becoming tired of the routine duties of home-life, they shouldered their rifles, and accompanied by a single negro slave wended their way northward through the wilds of Pennsylvania until reaching Centre County.*

Black faces would have been common enough along that early frontier. If this is not exactly "how the West was won," it is how the Centre was won.

*When Pennsylvania Slavery Did Not End*

In 1780, Pennsylvania famously took a pioneering lead among the emerging states in [formally abolishing slavery](#), but this was a gradual measure, and a grandfather clause allowed the continued enslavement of registered slaves. I quote Cassie Owens in the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#):

*Enslaved people born even the day before passage could still be kept in bondage for life. The last enslaved Pennsylvanians wouldn't be freed until 1847. And the children of enslaved people could be bound through indenture — wage-free labor for a set time as defined by contract — until they reached age 28. Historians estimate that 2,000 or so people, most of them African Americans, were indentured in the city by 1800.*

In 1790, Pennsylvania had 3,737 slaves out of a population of 434,000, under one percent: the comparable figure for Maryland was 32 percent, Delaware 15 percent. Virginia approached 40 percent.

*John and Flora*

But to return to the State College area. In 1799, a local iron-master advertised a reward for runaways:

*2s. Reward.*

*Ran away on the 2d inst. Negro man John about 22, also Negro girl named Flora about 18, Slender made, speaks bad English and a little French. Has a Scar on her upper lip and letters branded on her breast. Whoever secures the runaways in any place where their master can get them shall have the above reward and reasonable charges paid by*

*John Patton*

*Centre Furnace, Mifflin County [sic] July 20, 1799.*

[John Patton was another Protestant Irish immigrant](#) and a mainstay of the local Presbyterian network. In 1792, he joined with Colonel Samuel Miles to create that Centre Furnace. Other members of the Miles family had owned slaves in the region since the 1770s.

I am assuming John and Flora were domestics in Patton's house, as virtually all of the local slaves would be maids, cooks, or coachmen. This is not an industrial work force. But there are many, many stories here, which almost call for a historical novel. Dare I speculate that Flora had been brought to the US from Haiti, which would account for her French? We know that refugees from the Haitian revolution lived in Philadelphia, where they were partly blamed for [the yellow fever epidemic](#). How and where had she been branded on her breast? It sounds like a penalty inflicted for an earlier escape attempt.

Also, how many slaves were working in Centre County at any given point in the 1790s? Thirty or forty, perhaps? The number can't have been much larger, or else they would have left a larger demographic footprint after slavery was abolished. But the ones who happen to show up in the legal record are assuredly not the only ones who were there. And that was out of a small but growing total population.

*Towards Freedom, Slowly*

Far from ending in 1780, slavery in the region survived and actually expanded at the end of the century. In Gregg Township,

*James Cooke, Esq., came to Penn's Valley in 1790, and in 1792 erected a saw-mill, and in 1793 built a grist-mill at Spring Mills ... He came from Lancaster County, and was a man of large means, owning slaves.*

[Slaves continued to be registered](#) in Centre County after 1800. A convenient list records about fifteen slaves, or indentured virtual slaves, who belonged to most of the famous local families (mainly the iron-masters) between 1803 and 1820. We find for instance:

Ferguson Township

*Joseph Miles & Co. register Charles 7/25/1806, born 3/16/1806.*

Spring Township

*Philip Benner registers Kiz 9/27/1803, born April 13, 1803.*

*James Harris registers Lenora 7/25/1806, born 2/3/1809 mulatto.*

*Joseph Miles registers Jerry 6/3/1809, born 2/1/1809.*

If you know the area at all, all those slave-owners' names are very familiar. Besides all those Potter names I mentioned earlier, modern day Centre County has townships named for Patton, Gregg, Harris, Benner, and Miles, as well as the borough of Milesburg. You can't avoid driving on the Benner Pike.

Here is a typical [entry from 1803](#):

*James Rankin of Potter Township, farmer, being duly sworn according to law deposith and saith that on the twenty second day of March one thousand eight hundred and three his negroe wench named Sall was delivered of a male mulatto child he calls by the name of Peter.*

An obituary of [another of the Rankin family](#) is apparently describing James when it describes a couple as "of highly respectable social standing, and exemplary and useful members of the Presbyterian Church."

In 1802, the first capital case tried in the new Centre County involved the Bellefonte slave Daniel Byers, "the property of Mr. J. Smith." Byers was executed for murdering a free mulatto, in a dispute over a white woman. The social picture that emerges from the account of the trial and execution sounds uncannily Southern. The story had a grotesque outcome. The first execution attempt failed when the rope broke, as the watching crowd demanded the prisoner's release. "Meanwhile, William

Petriken stepped up to Dan, and patted him on the shoulder, saying, ‘Dan, you have always been a good boy, go up now and be hung like a man,’ which he did.”

By 1830, Centre County had 18,763 White inhabitants, and 263 Blacks. Still, even at this very late point, Potter Township had four female slaves, and one male.

### *Slave Catchers*

The existence of slavery elsewhere in the nation also threatened Black residents of the region. In 1826, some Virginian slave-catchers arrived at Bellefonte to seize two runaway slaves:

*They were paraded through the streets, bound hand and foot with ropes, and taken to jail. There was many an eye to pity but none to save.*

A local judge examined the credentials of the owners, and granted their right to seize their human property. I assume something similar occurred in 1833, although the account is not quite clear:

*On the 16th of May a colored woman, who had lived in Bellefonte for over six years, married, and, having several children, was remanded into slavery by the court in Bellefonte.*

Over the next few decades, Centre County developed a militant anti-slavery tradition, with a lively underground railroad. Bellefonte had a substantial African-American community, and supported an AME church.

The area’s Scotch-Irish Presbyterians became mainstays of the Republican cause and passionately supported Lincoln in the Civil War. Pennsylvania's wartime governor was Andrew Gregg Curtin, a descendant of both General Potter and Andrew Gregg. So strong for the Union cause was Curtin's Bellefonte that German and Democrat sections actually tried to secede from Centre County. But that is another story.

### *Remembering and Forgetting*

So much for the bare facts, but how do we interpret them?

Historians are not at all surprised to find slaves in the eighteenth century northern colonies, or the early nineteenth century states, although non-specialists might be amazed to find such a situation in an area like Central Pennsylvania, far outside the great cities. Without detracting from the moral debate, we should stress that the numerical scale of slavery was totally different in an area like this from the South or Middle Colonies. You can legitimately argue that the prosperity of a state like South Carolina, or a city like Charleston, was built on the backs of African slave labor. A great Virginian landowners might own hundreds of slaves.

That was absolutely not the case in central Pennsylvania, which was a society with slaves, rather than a slave society. Economically, local society in no sense depended on that slave labor, and domestic slaves like Daphne and Flora were incidental to the larger settlement. When slavery vanished after 1800, it made no difference to the area’s economic boom.



In understanding the phenomenon, it's important to recall that prior to the 1760s, [very few people indeed](#) in Europe or North America (or Africa, or Asia) argued that slavery as such was wrong or improper, and it is not at all surprising to find pious Presbyterians (or Quakers) holding slaves. When Pennsylvania acted against the practice in 1780, in however limited a fashion, the state was at the far radical end of contemporary opinion. Such slave-owning became more debatable, and questionable, from the 1790s onward.

I am absolutely not arguing that the Centre Region should [overthrow all the memories](#) of its own local founding fathers, of people like General Potter. The same applies to other northern areas. With all its flaws and evils, the history is the history, and can't simply be discarded or silenced as if it never existed. Nor can it be judged by ahistorical hindsight.

But there is a special obligation in this part of the world. The South absolutely remembers its slavery inheritance, and struggles how to confront and expiate it. The North, in contrast, has virtually forgotten its own story, and thanks God that it is not a grave sinner like those terrible people in the South, all those publicans and slave-owners. If you do a Google search for "slavery" in the context of the areas I have been describing, you will find a huge amount about the Underground Railroad, and Bellefonte abolitionism. Centre County and its churches, it seems, just existed to help Southern slaves escape from bondage. About the actual local slaves, and slave-owners, you'll find next to nothing.

Areas like Central Pennsylvania need to take more account of their historic Black presence. We really should have some memorials to the Daphnes and the Floras, and their like.

My main source throughout is John Blair Linn, *History of Centre and Clinton Counties, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883). This is not critical history in any modern sense, but Linn had access to a stunning range of early documents, many of which are now lost.

More generally, see Marc Howard Ross, *Slavery in the North: Forgetting History and Recovering Memory* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

## HOW THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE CAME TO BOALSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA



Look at this figure, and tell me what it is, and where it is. The first question is easy. The second is odd, to the point of being bizarre. It involves some real twists and turns, with curious international and diplomatic angles.

The statue is unquestionably the Virgin of Guadalupe, the form of the Virgin uniquely beloved in Mexico. It looks as if it came from a wayside shrine, or a church in Mexico itself, and I think it is a significant piece. As to date, seventeenth century is plausible, if not earlier, but I am wide open on this. As I'll explain, establishing exact provenance is not really possible. By way of comparison, here is the famous original Guadalupe image:



But where this particular statue can now be found is surprising indeed. It stands at the heart of a open air monument commemorating the fallen officers of the [US 28<sup>th</sup> Division](#), at a First World War shrine attached to the [Pennsylvania Military Museum](#) in Boalsburg, PA, a few miles from State College. Historically, that is absolutely not an area with any particular Latino heritage. Nor until quite recent times was Catholicism strong in the area. In Boalsburg, as in most villages and smaller towns in the area, the obvious older churches are all Protestant, whether German (Lutheran or Reformed) or Scotch-Irish (Presbyterian or Methodist). So how did this ultra-Catholic statue get here?





I have known this statue for many years, and occasionally wondered about it. But when I started asking questions, it soon emerged that virtually nobody could supply detailed answers, and even people who knew the site well had basically no idea that the Virgin was there, or what she was. As far as I can tell, that neglect also extends to the sizable Penn State/State College Catholic community, who have never (say) organized any kind of religious event there. Put it this way: after many years of residence, I have never met anyone in the area who has so much as heard of the statue.

So here are my investigations to date, and further assistance would be greatly appreciated.

The story begins with the Boal family, firm Protestants who left Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century and settled on the then-wild frontier, founding the village of Boalsburg. One later member

of the house acquired considerable wealth. This was [Theodore Davis Boal](#) (1867-1938), a prosperous architect. Theodore – “Terry” – was strongly committed to France, where he married his wife. From the late 1890s, he adopted the lifestyle of a country squire in a great house, as he [expanded and reconstructed that original house](#) in Boalsburg. Through his wife, he even inherited the chapel that had once belonged to Christopher Columbus – and which now, amazingly, stands reconstructed in Boalsburg, PA.

Anyone familiar with Northern Ireland will know the Boal name from the very important far-Right Protestant politician [Desmond Boal](#), sometimes described as the brains behind Ian Paisley. I assume he was distant kin, which makes the Catholic aspects of the family’s US history all the more ironic.

In the early twentieth century, Theodore Boal shared the alarm of his friend and namesake, Theodore Roosevelt, about growing menaces to US national security. Accordingly, he prepared his own militia troop ready for the day when war would come. In 1916, he founded the “Boal Troop,” a mobile machine gun unit, which was then incorporated into the Pennsylvania National Guard. I take the following from Philip Sauerlender, “Boalsburg’s Rough Riders: Terry Boal and the Boal Troop,” *Mansion Notes*, 38.1, Centre County Historical Society, Winter 2016:

*They were sent in the Fall to guard the Mexican border in Texas while Pershing chased Pancho Villa.*

I originally suspected that the Guadalupe figure might have been acquired during the Boal Troop’s 1916 service on or over the Mexican border. Visions of *The Wild Bunch* danced before my eyes ... but this turns out to be flat wrong. Back to Sauerlender:

*The next year war was declared and the Boal Troop was incorporated into the 28th Division U.S. Army as part of a machine gun battalion. Theodore Boal was detached and put on the staff of the 28th Division. Both Boal and the troop served in the war where they received honors.*

Theodore became a Lieutenant Colonel.

*Boal returned from France with a railroad carload of military relics for a planned 28th Division Officers’ Club and Museum on his estate. The troop was reformed and stables built on the property. As part of the Officers’ Club, Boal designed and started construction of a World War Memorial. Although the Officers’ Club and cavalry troop were disbanded, the memorial was expanded and evolved into the present 28th Division Memorial and Pennsylvania Military Museum in Boalsburg.*

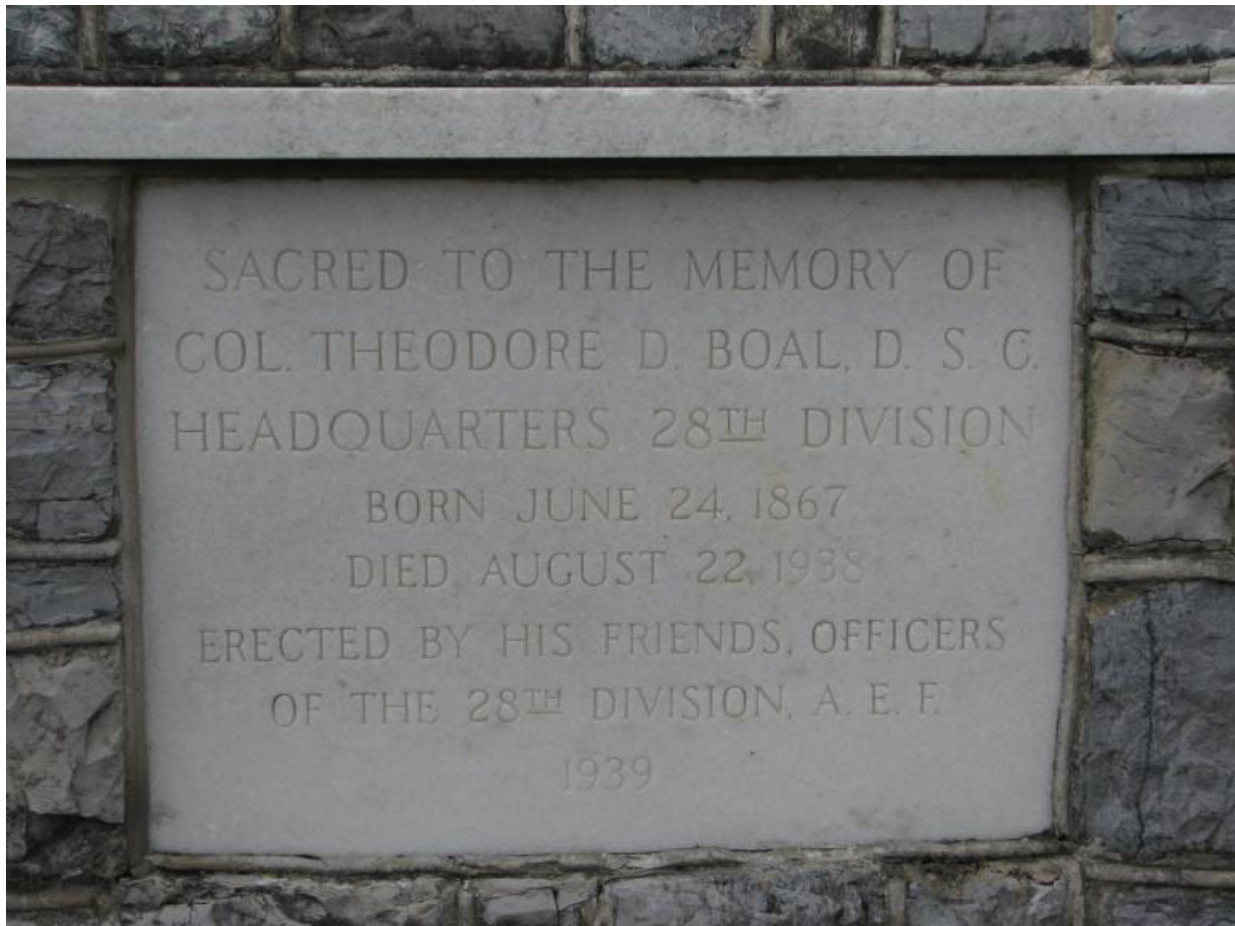
As the shrine grew in the 1920s, it incorporated an extensive wall containing plaques commemorating officers, and in the center was a blank space intended for Boal himself when he died. This was a shrine within a shrine, which is deliberately built to look like an altar. This is the space now occupied by the Mexican Virgin.

The responsibility for filling that vacant space on the wall fell to Theodore Boal’s son [Pierre de Lagarde Boal](#) (1895-1966). As his name suggests, Pierre was born in France, and he maintained that [European connection throughout his life](#). He married a French wife, and converted to Catholicism for the occasion. A romantic figure straight from the pages of Scott Fitzgerald, he joined the French army cavalry, the *Cuirassiers*, and in 1914-15 he fought with the [Lafayette Flying Corps](#), the *Lafayette Escadrille*. He received a Legion of Honor citation, the Purple Heart, the Croix de la Guerre with gilt



star, and the Lafayette Flying Corps ribbon. He enjoyed a distinguished diplomatic career, with a focus on Latin America. That included time in Mexico, in 1919, and again from 1936 through 1940, as Counselor to the US Embassy. He served as Envoy Extraordinary to Nicaragua (1941-42) and US Ambassador Extraordinary to Bolivia (1942-44).

To pull the story together, Theodore Boal died in August 1938, and a monument was indeed erected. In September 1940, a newspaper article reports “that Pierre Boal (attached to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City) brought back with him a Madonna and bell he obtained in Mexico for placement above the altar.” (I owe this reference to the kindness of Military Museum educator, Mr. Joe Horvath).



So what exactly is this statue? It is certainly Mexican, but the question remains of just where that statue had come from in the first place. “Obtained” how exactly? Surely some local church did not just decide to hand a cherished item over to the wealthy *gringo* passing through? This is not from a parish gift shop.

Some context might be in order. In the decades following the Mexican Revolution, [the Catholic church suffered severely in that country](#). Brutal persecutions recurred during the *Cristero* War of 1926-29, a horrific conflict largely forgotten by Americans, in which over a hundred thousand perished – not to mention hundreds of thousands of refugees forced to flee to the US. Mexican left-

wing radicals were very repressive toward clergy and believers through the 1930s, the era made famous by [Graham Greene's \*The Power and the Glory\*](#) (1940).

Through those years, Mexico was in semi-permanent confrontations with the United States, and that made the Mexican struggles a recurrent issue in domestic US politics. The US Catholic church, and Catholic leaders, repeatedly demanded intervention against the radicals and persecutors, even to the point of advocating invasion. In 1927, the Mexican government was dreading a US invasion, and US Catholics were praying for one – although the Coolidge administration itself apparently never seriously planned for such a step. Had US forces actually decided to occupy Mexico, a detailed plan was sitting on their shelves, namely War Plan Green, which remained notionally in force until 1946.

Concern continued through the 1930. In 1932, Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Acerba Animi* (On the Persecution of the Church in Mexico). In the US, the demagogic Father Charles Coughlin made these Mexican horrors one of his special themes, and warned of sinister plots between Mexico and the Soviet Union. Father Michael Kenny published hair-raising books denouncing Mexican atrocities, under titles like *No God Next Door – Red Rule in Mexico and Our Responsibility* (1935): that book became an overnight best-seller. Cries for intervention became all the more strident in 1938 when Mexico [nationalized US-owned oil resources in the country](#).

Weirdly, one of the main forces in the US strenuously opposing such aggressive interventionism through that whole period was that well-known body of upstanding anti-war, anti-imperialist, liberals ... um, the Ku Klux Klan, who made it one of their big campaigning issues. After all, they really could not see much wrong with the thought of a secularist/Masonic government persecuting Catholics. The Klan donated money to the Mexican government to help them suppress Catholic *Cristero* rebels. The US Knights of Columbus tried to support those same rebels financially – while denying military aid – making it a kind of proxy war.

As a diplomat, Pierre Boal would have been in a very delicate position through these explosive years of the late 1930s. Was the statue a present to Boal from some devout Mexican Catholic family, perhaps grateful for his assistance? As I noted, his connections with the country went back decades. For what it is worth, the *Cristero* revolutionary slogan was “Long live Christ the King! Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe!” Note the *Cristeros*’ Guadalupe banner here:



[Public Domain](#)

Or to offer a scenario that is at least as likely, it is very feasible that some local government official or warlord could simply have looted the statue from some church or shrine, and sold it to the highest bidder. A lot of church properties were plundered and desecrated in these bitter years, especially during the *Cristero* struggles, and many once-prized items were on the open market. It is rather like the antiquities market in the Middle East today following the wars in Iraq and Syria. As a faithful Catholic, Pierre Boal would have had nothing consciously to do with any such misappropriation, and he might have regarded buying the statue as a chance to save it from outright destruction. I am speculating.

Or assume that he simply purchased it through a dealer. So where did the dealer get it in the first place? It was assuredly not through any simple legal channels, and it had very likely been looted. Again, Pierre Boal was no wide-eyed tourist in Mexico, and he would certainly have known that.

Whatever the origins, erecting a statue like this in the particular circumstances of 1940 was a highly political statement about ongoing affairs in Mexico, although perhaps nobody watching the

ceremony at Boalsburg realized this, except for Pierre Boal and his immediate family. But it also had a strong US resonance, at the exact time that Father Coughlin's Christian Front paramilitaries were running riot in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York City (for instance), attacking Jews and leftists. Whether in Mexican politics – or US domestic affairs – the statue was even a pretty aggressive declaration, and there is no way around that. For a diplomat like Pierre Boal – well, it was pretty undiplomatic.

If anyone can suggest any further context about the statue's date or region of manufacture, I would love to know. Does anyone know of some plausible parallels?





But here is my point. However it got there, we have a fine and rather moving statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the middle of rural Pennsylvania. Back in 1940, it was purely exotic, but in the modern US, with its sharply rising Latino population, it acquires a whole new relevance. If I had any say in the doings of the PA Military Museum, or of Boalsburg itself, I would draw attention to this, and try to attract visitors.

Who knows, it could yet become a regional pilgrimage shrine in the traditional sense of that word. See you there next December 12?

And I haven't even started on the bell that Pierre brought back with him ...

