

Richland Lutheran Church

“Richland Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized in 1789 by the Rev. Christian Eberhart Bernhardt, pastor of three other Lutheran congregations in Guilford and Orange Counties. The first church was built in 1790. After a doctrinal split in 1820, two congregations shared the church until 1849. On July 14, 1849, the Evangelical Lutheran congregation voted to build a new meeting house “12 feet high, 35 feet wide and 55 feet long,” to be paid for by subscription. The 1849 building exists (1985) virtually unaltered, with 9/9sash and one-panel double doors. The church has been inactive since 1850. The adjacent cemetery has many unusual early tombstones.” *The Architectural History of Randolph County, N.C.* by Mac Whatley, 1985

“Now inactive and deserted (1976) Richland Lutheran Church was the first of that denomination to be located in Randolph County. The original membership came from the combined Lutheran and Reform German immigrants who worshiped together at Barton’s Meeting House (ca. 1766), now Liberty Grove United Methodist Church.

“The first church was built of logs and had a gallery, a high pulpit and is said to have had an elevated pew built especially for the officers of the church.

“Richland was a first in a parish with Low’s Lutheran Church, St. Paul’s Lutheran near Alamance and Friedens Lutheran at Gibsonville. Later it was joined with Melanchthon (1851) and Grace Lutheran churches (1911), whose first members had come from Richland. Gradually the members moved away and services were discontinued in 1950.

“John Long, the first Randolph County native to serve in the United States House of Representatives, lies buried at Richland graveyard, as does his son Dr. John Wesley Long, for whom Wesley Long Hospital in Greensboro is named.” *Francine Holt Swaim, The Francine Swaim Collection, Liberty Public Library, Liberty, N.C.*

Lutheran minister Rev. Philip Henkel, who died on Oct. 9th, 1833, aged 54 years, 17 days, is also interred at the cemetery. The Rev. Henkel, a minister for

33 years, traveled 1534 miles from the May 11 to August 7, 1812, preaching 50 sermons. He was visiting Richland and preached his last sermon there before dying soon afterwards.

Also buried at Richland are many of the areas early German families, Staley, Fox, Moretz, Spoon, Coble, Kime, Reitzel and others.

The Richland Gospel Church now holds services in the building, which has been radically altered and expanded. The church sits at 7661 Richland Church Road, Liberty, N.C. in the north-east corner of Randolph County right on the Guilford County line.