

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Don Rittle Sr., 717-866-7320

Subject: "Little White Church" Needs Volunteers

MOUNT AETNA, Berks County --- Known locally as the Little White Church, this historic structure has been standing in the village of Mount Aetna since before the Civil War. Preserved in the 20th century because of its significance, the building needs people in the 21st century to take an interest in its existence to ensure its continued survival. A semi-annual service on Sunday, May 15th will help to raise funds for its upkeep.

Twice a year, services are held in the historic church on the third Sunday of May and the third Sunday of September. The service will begin at 2:30 p.m. The public is invited to hear a message from Pastor Chris Smith, Mt. Zion Brethren Church. He will be accompanied by his wife Cynthia who will share her musical talents through song. Playing the historic reed organ will be David Schell. Refreshments will be served following the service.

Built in 1848 on land donated by George and Mary Zellers, the church was the site for religious services for many generations after its founding as Trinity United Brethren Church. The Zellers family were farmers who hosted religious services on their farm for 40 years prior to donating the land for the church to be built on. The building, which has not been used for regular services since 1969, was saved from demolition in 1976 by a small group of friends. The Mt. Aetna Trinity United Brethren Preservation Association was organized and held a 130-year anniversary celebration in 1978.

The Little White Church is a rare survivor of German-style frame architecture. It has graduated siding, nine-foot doors, windows with nine panes over six, a reed pump organ, original pews and altar, center chimney, steeple with bell, and a historic cemetery where Civil War veterans are interred, including John Weidel (Pvt. Co. A 93 Regt, PA. Inf). His tombstone was repaired and reset by the Mount Aetna Patriotic Order Sons of America in their last act before the group disbanded. Veterans of World War I and II are also at rest in this cemetery.

Tulpehocken Settlement Historical Society created an extensive record of those buried there. For those interested in genealogy, family names include Batdorf, Bauseman, Boyer, Clay, Darkes, Daub, Dundore, Gruber, Helm, Hicks, Himmelberger, Hunsicker, Katerman, Kelchner, Keller, Kerr, Klopp, Kreitz, Lewis, Licht, Long, Lutz, Mock, Moyer, Nase, Noll, Rebson, Schell, Schoener, Snyder, Sporman, Wagner, Weidel, Zeller, and Zimmerman. Founders of the Association were the Kochenberger, Klopp and Schell families, descendants of some of the original church members.

Don Rittle, who currently serves on the Board of the non-profit organization that has preserved the Little White Church, said they are looking for volunteers who are interested in helping to sustain efforts to preserve this part of Berks County's history. While not confirmed, he mentioned the church may have been a location where Civil War recruits were mustered into the Grand Army of the Republic. He is hoping people knowledgeable on Civil War history may be able to help shed some light on this information. Help is needed to clean, paint, research, and promote the role the Little White Church played in the community. It will celebrate 170 years in 2018.

Donations for the church and cemetery upkeep are welcome and can be mailed to Mrs. Barbara Rinehart, 19 Glenwood Drive, Myerstown, PA 17067 or contributed on May 15th during the service. Checks should be made payable to Mt. Aetna Trinity U.B. Preservation Association. The church is located in the village of Mt. Aetna along Route 501. For more information about the May event or to volunteer, contact Don Rittle Sr. at 717-866-7320.



Little White Church, Mount Aetna, built in 1848



Reed Pump Organ

;