

THE ARCHIVES AT BETHANY

1863 Bethany Road Womelsdorf, PA 19567 (610)589-4501 Email: archives@bethanyhome.org

Before the Orphans came to Womelsdorf...

There was a Healing and Noble Spring Resort.

The site we know today as Bethany Children's Home was once home to the Manderbach Springs Resort; a place for cooling rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation, here in the beautiful and spacious mountains of Womelsdorf. The property was owned by the Manderbach Family which consisted of John Manderbach, the father, Elizabeth the mother, and sons, David and Henry who lived nearby and as their father owned distilleries and mills. When John died in June of 1863 his son Henry who was also the sheriff of Berks County was listed as the executor of the estate. John's property was bought by his son David, who in turn sold it back to Henry. In 1867 the Hotel Resort was sold to the Shepherd of the Lambs Orphan's Home and in 1873 the surrounding farmland was also sold to the Home.

Note: there were other children in the Manderbach family, Elizabeth 1824-1888, John H. 1826-1865, Seraphine 1841-1853, and a possible son named William, not confirmed.

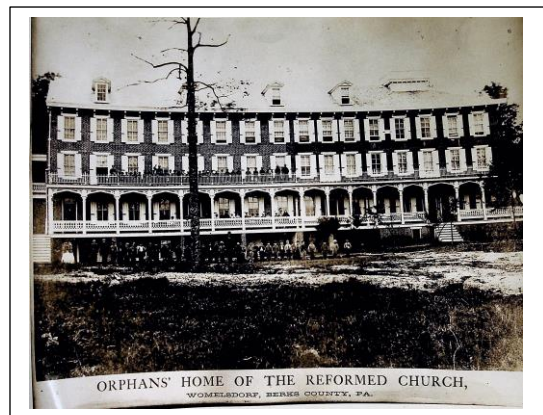


In the mid-1850s, John Manderbach decided to build his hotel to provide lodging for people who visited the spring on his property. It was a summer resort called "Manderbach Springs" and by July of 1859 a railroad depot was created and called the Womelsdorf Station to help visitors easily come to the Springs. Manderbach Springs was host to picnics, Democratic rallies and other events to draw in the guests. After John's death in 1863 and transfer of

property to his son Henry it was operated for a time as the South Mountain House, until it was sold in 1867 to the orphan's home.

The site was widely celebrated for its crystal clear “mineral” spring water, it was originally known as the Indian Sand Spring or Sand Spring, a natural flowing spring about 20+ feet in diameter. The building placed here was a three-story brick structure, 120 feet by 30 feet, exclusive of a basement. It had a large-frame kitchen attached, a bathhouse, and icehouse, a bowling alley, stabling and other out-buildings on about 11 acres, although it was sold with 26 acres. It was remembered for its observatory, high above the structure, and the paths leading to Eagle's Peak at the top of the mountain. (Bloss, 2012)

On June 27, 1867, several synods of the Reformed Church bought the property which also included a small mill and other improvements, together with a tract of 26 acres for \$34,000. On October 29 of the same year the property was dedicated as the Orphans' Home of the Shepherd of the Lambs' (in 1873 the home by order of the court was named Bethany Orphans' Home) (Meiser, 1991 w/name correction of Home based on year.)



Dedication of the Orphans' Home occurred on Tuesday, October 29 of 1867. “Owing to the inclemency of the weather, a large number of its warmest friends were prevented from being present. At one PM the services of the occasion were opened, in the Chapel, with chanting of the Te Deum by the Orphans, The Rev. A.S. Leinbach, of this city, and B.S. Schneck, D.D., of Chambersburg, PA., delivered appropriate addresses in the German language and J.W. Nevin, D.D., of Lancaster, and Rev. C.Z. Weiser, of Montgomery county, Pa., spoke in the English language. (Reading Daily Times, 1867)

A Home for the Fatherless...has come to be.

Next month's newsletter we will take a step back and talk about our neighbor, property, Conrad Weiser and the indirect relationship between he/his family, the Manderbach's, and the Bethany Children's Home.