

Benvenue Manor

Approximately one mile west of the Butler County town of Zeligonle on Route 68 is Benvenue Manor, a three-story stone house built in 1816. Benvenue has an interesting history and story.

George Henry Muller (1778-1873) was a native of Hamburg, Germany and was born into culture and high social rank. He was a West-Indian plantation owner and an export-import merchant in Havana, Cuba, New Orleans and Mexico City, Mexico. Muller fought in the War of 1812 against the British under General Andrew Jackson (1). He moved from the Baltimore area with his wife (also his cousin) Therese, her parents and siblings. They settled in the Harmony area where Father Rapp of the Harmonist Society rented to them three log cabins and then a brick house and small farm (2).

In 1815, Muller bought 227 acres at a cost of \$11 per acre from Phillip Passavant, son-in-law of the founder of Zeligonle. Muller built a log cabin to live in while their large, stone house was constructed on a hill overlooking the valley of the Connoquenessing and the village of Zeligonle (3). Field stone from the property was quarried to build the house, which was designed by Muller's friend Detmar Basse, founder of Zeligonle.

Some interesting notes are that George Henry Muller's nephew, Charles Hopkins, was the composer of "We Three Kings of Orient Are." In addition, Muller's second wife, Louiza Lightner, had a younger sister named Jesse who married Stephen Foster's brother, Morrison Foster, a state senator from Pennsylvania. Also, the George Washington Trail goes through the Benvenue property. Lastly, St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Zeligonle

was founded in 1821 in the Muller home. The early congregation met in the Great Hall (the entrance foyer), which has 13-foot ceilings, until their church building was built in 1829.

In 1902, Benvenue was purchased by the Bethany Bible Society, which was founded in 1823 and located on Centre Avenue in Pittsburgh, from Evelyn Muller, a descendant of George Henry Muller (4). Bethany's first mission was housing orphans and serving others. They also published and distributed free Bibles and religious tracts in several languages. They moved the greater part of their organization to Benvenue, including their printing operation. Bethany Society employees, at one time numbering 50 persons, lived and worked in a communal fashion. The self-sufficient group raised their own food including corn, wheat, oats, cattle, chicken and pigs. The Society was a close group who knew or cared little about the outside world. Those within the group did not marry and consequently, their numbers dwindled.

There were only three Society members at Benvenue when Margo and Roger Hogan purchased it in 1963. Roger Hogan's grandmother, a widow, and her son (Roger's father), had lived and worked for the Society. Roger had stayed in contact with the last remaining members of the Bethany group and continued to visit at Benvenue, taking his children there for hiking and picnics. Through this association, he and his wife were able to purchase the property, which consisted of 120 acres.

The Society left records that include order forms for Bibles, some dated as early as 1909. Requests came from around the world including Brazil, Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and British Guiana. There were also requests for Bibles printed in Chinese, Spanish, Lettic, Hindi, Mandarin and Cantonese (5).

The Bethany Society had added plumbing (which included a sink in every bedroom), wiring, installation of a coal furnace, open gas stoves in each room and marble fireplaces. When the Hogans moved into the house in 1964, the old gas lights were still in each room and in working condition, although electricity had been installed and was in use. The Hogans removed the gas stoves and some of the gas lights and converted the coal furnace to oil. The Hogans acquired some of the antique furniture which included a nearly floor-to-ceiling bookcase with hand-rolled glass doors. The massive bookcase had been hauled up the steep hill by a horse-drawn wagon years earlier. The Hogans raised beef cattle on the property and their six children.

After Mr. Hogan's death, his wife ran the Benvenue as a Bed & Breakfast for several years. Mrs. Hogan won the 1998 Angel Award from the Zelenople Historical Society for historical preservation.

The present owner of Benvenue is one of Mrs. Hogan's daughters. Three of Mrs. Hogan's other children live in houses built on the Benvenue property (6). It is interesting to note that this historical property has had only three owners in almost 200 years.

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