

Storch, Carl August Gottlieb ^[1]

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by Robert C. Carpenter, 1994

16 June 1764–29 Mar. 1831

Carl August Gottlieb Storch, the third Lutheran ^[2] minister to serve in North Carolina, was the son of Georg Friedrich Storch, a German merchant, and the former Miss von Asseburg. Carl A. G. Storch was born in Helmstedt in the duchy of Braunschweig, Germany. Confirmed in the Lutheran church in 1779, he spent three years in high school and the next three years as a student of theological sciences at Helmstedt University ^[3]. In 1785 he became a tutor of a rich nobleman; later he taught the children of a rich Bremen merchant.

Early in 1788 the Reverend Abbot Verhusen, director of the Helmstedt Mission Society, called Storch to become a pastor in North Carolina. In May, after he had been examined and ordained, the young man began his journey to America. Two months later he arrived in Baltimore. He sailed to Charleston, S.C., then joined the Reverend Adolph Nussman, a pioneer Lutheran minister who lived on Buffalo Creek in Rowan County ^[4], N.C. Following a short illness after his exhausting journey to North Carolina, he assumed his duties as pastor of Salisbury Church, Organ Church, and Peintkirche (or Pine Church). By November he was established and residing in Salisbury ^[5]. He performed his ministerial duties at the three churches from 1789 to 1803.

On 2 May 1803 Storch attended a special conference at Salisbury, where plans for a North Carolina Synod were discussed. On 17 October he was present at the first North Carolina Lutheran Synod meeting at Lincolnton ^[6], where a constitution was adopted. Storch and the Reverend Johann Gottfried Arends led in the establishment of the synod. During those early years Storch exercised leadership, serving as synod president during the period 1805–11, 1813, and 1816–20. Known for his liberal attitudes towards other religious groups, he encouraged the members of the North Carolina church to cooperate with other Lutheran synods and with other denominations. Cooperation was extended to the South Carolina Lutheran Synod, and under Storch's direction, the North Carolina Synod considered uniting with the Lutheran General Synod of Pennsylvania. The North Carolina Synod requested that the Moravians ^[7] properly instruct Lutheran children around Salem ^[8]. Storch also helped the Protestant Episcopal church organize itself in North Carolina. He and four other Lutheran ministers even signed a certificate of ordination for Robert Johnstone Miller into that church. Miller, in turn, assisted in Lutheran affairs and attended sessions of the North Carolina Synod.

Amid the move towards cooperation in the 1810s, controversy erupted. While Storch was president, a conservative reaction emerged against interdenominational cooperation and against unification with the General Synod. The primary dispute concerned the fact that David Henkel, after a four-year wait, was refused ordination. Henkel was the leader of the splinter group and became the symbol for its opposition. On 29 May 1820 President Storch presided at the annual North Carolina Lutheran Convention in Lincolnton; Henkel and his supporters attended, and the issues were debated. Storch opened the meeting with a "fervent prayer" to "establish peace and harmony among us." He suggested that both sides forget their differences and admit their mistakes. However, his conciliatory tone was abandoned by the convention. After angry debate, the synod refused to ordain Henkel, and Henkel and his followers left the North Carolina Synod and in July established the Tennessee Synod.

Following the synod break, Storch never again accepted the presidency even though he was twice reelected. Poor health, which had plagued him earlier, dominated the rest of his life. He was afflicted with an "incurable disease of the eyes" and suffered "fits of depression and melancholy." These disorders often interfered with his regular ministry, which ended in 1825, and caused his complete retirement in 1828. Storch spent his last few years on his farm near Salisbury. He died after an extended illness and was buried in the Organ Lutheran Church Cemetery.

Contemporaries characterized Storch as a devoted and well-educated preacher. His sermons were simple but relevant; he cared little for worldly affairs. Proficient in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, he spoke five or six languages. Physically, he was tall with irregular features and a massive head. His diary, which is entirely in German, meticulously lists the hundreds of persons he baptized, buried, and confirmed and the payment he received for each service.

In addition to being a pastor, Storch was the local banker and librarian, and he taught school in Salisbury. He was an early adherent of the temperance movement. But his periods of depression and his slowness in social discourse limited his effectiveness. Indeed, the Tennessee Synod split occurred despite his attempts to avert it. According to one observer, he was unable to cope with the split.

On 14 Jan. 1790 Storch married Christine Bahrt (Beard), the daughter of Johann Ludwig Bahrt of Salisbury. Of their eleven children, only Anna and Theophilus survived infancy. The Reverend Theophilus Storch, D.D., was a leader of the Virginia Lutheran Synod and later became president of Newberry College ^[9] in South Carolina.

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