



### Marker #23

Though there is earlier reference in history records of Lutheran services being performed in scattered areas in the Helleberghs, it was not until after the Revolutionary War that the First Lutheran Church was erected. Previous to the War, as early as 1734, services such as baptisms, weddings and funerals were accommodated in private homes when a Lutheran minister, Dominie Berkenmyer, happened to be travelling in the vicinity on his way to Schoharie.

Lutherans secured a grant of land from the patroon, Stephen VanRensselaer, near where Fairview Cemetery stands today. There is no record of the first structure, but letters found in an old trunk in the Severson Inn confirm that the newly organized St. James Evangelical Church of the Hellebergh was started under the leadership of the Reverend Heinrich Moeller. Reverend Moeller referred to the Helleberghs as the "perfect wilderness." The church was, at times, referred to as St. Jacobus', the German name for James.

On August 3, 1788 a first communion was held. It marked the opening of the first Lutheran edifice between Albany and Schoharie. After Rev. Moeller left to take his final pastorate in Sharon, New York, the Guilderland Lutheran Church saw a number of pastors, including one who was in trouble with the Albany Committee of Conspiracies during the Revolution.

In 1806, when the church was in need of repairs and the congregation had no money, they asked for help and were given it by the Dutch Reformed Church, their neighbor down the road.

In 1818, the Reverend Lot Merkel, at a salary of \$300 per year, preached his sermons alternately in German and English. He was succeeded by the Reverend Adam Crounse, who remained 10 years at St. James. He was the uncle of Dr. Frederick Crounse, Altamont's first doctor.

The old church was abandoned to make way for two new churches, St. Mark's of Guilderland Center and St. John's of Knowersville (Altamont). A few of its early parishioners rest in Fairview Cemetery near the site of the old church. The tired, worn-looking historic marker at the fork of Weaver and Hawes Road on Route 146 reflects the age of the church it represents.