

Jacob Guelick, a Strong Lay Leader

St. John's first minister was the Rev. Joseph Zaeslin [Zesline] who served the congregation until his death in 1818. According to the *History of St. John's Unitarian Church* written by the Rev. Hugo Eisenlohr, the United Brethren in Christ had a missionary settlement in North Bend, west of Cincinnati. With no one available to fill the vacancy left by the Rev. Zaeslin's death, missionaries from the United Brethren filled the pulpit. The congregation found the missionaries "crude and uneducated" in comparison to the Rev. Zaeslin. Jacob Guelick took on the duties of minister and kept the German Lutheran Church alive.

At the time, the church was the only German church in Cincinnati. The congregation was made up of people from many regions of Germany. As a result, different religious views were expressed. Guelick tried to unite the congregation, with some success. As a way to bring the congregation together, he invited all to an Easter supper. He stipulated that the feast was for Christians, not Catholics, Reformed or any other denomination. The entire congregation attended. In 1820 there was a heated debate over the need for a new church building. The debate became so heated that the floor of the church collapsed. Guelick resigned and the Rev. Ludwig Meyer became minister. Guelick remained active in the church and served on the Church Council as indicated in the 1833 minutes.

Jacob Guelick was born in 1784 in Hamburg, Germany. He left in 1807 to avoid military service under the French. He travelled to Baltimore, the West Indies, and in 1810 to London. In 1811, he reached New York and then returned to Baltimore where he entered the sugar refining business. In 1816 Martin Baum, an owner of a sugar refinery in Cincinnati, traveled to Baltimore to find a manager for his business. He heard about Guelick, who had been working in sugar refining for ten years. Baum offered Guelick the manager position in Cincinnati and Guelick accepted. They agreed on a salary of \$1,350 per year plus travel expenses. Baum and Guelick travelled by stage coach from Baltimore to Pittsburgh. They traveled by flatboat from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati in October, when the water of the Ohio River was low. This part of the trip lasted 28 days, when almost every day they were stuck in the river for a few hours.

Jacob Guelick was a kind-hearted man. In 1817 a boat arrived in Cincinnati with 23 German immigrants. The immigrants were unable to pay for their passage from Germany to the United States. According to practices of the time, the captain was permitted to sell the passengers to pay for their passage. Guelick heard his countrymen would be sold as indentured servants in Louisiana to cover the cost of their transportation. Guelick borrowed \$1,000 to pay the owner, hoping the immigrants would repay him but that never happened.

In 1869 Jacob Guelick died at his home at Arch and Ludlow Streets near the site of old Fort Washington where the German community lived at the time. He was survived by his wife, two daughters and many grandchildren. Nine of his children preceded him in death.

Sources:

1. *History of St. John's Unitarian Church* by the Rev. Hugo Eisenlohr, Read at the Western Unitarian Conference Historical Society, May 1934

2. *Evening Chronical*, "Jacob Guelich," Cincinnati, Ohio, November 16, 1869
3. *Early Nineteenth-Century German Settlers in Ohio* by Clifford N. Smith
4. *The German Immigrant*, "History of the German Evangelical Churches in Cincinnati," by Robert C. Rau, March 1989.