

## The Reverend Joseph Zesline

St. John's first minister, the Rev. Joseph Zesline [Zaeslin], was pastor of the German Lutheran Church of Cincinnati from the fall of 1814 until his death on January 31, 1818, according to his obituary printed in *The Western Spy* newspaper on February 7, 1818. The Rev. Zesline's obituary contains details of his life and portrays a deeply religious man. The following is a summary of his life and death as described in the obituary. Quotes are included for interesting expressions of the time.

Joseph Zesline was born about 1771 in Basil, Switzerland, into a respected family. They were wealthy before wars that originated with the French Revolution. Zesline received "a polite and liberal education" that qualified him for "distinguished usefulness in the kingdom of the divine and illustrious Redeemer." Early in his life he was a member of the Moravians and served as minister for this Christian group.

Zesline left Switzerland, referred to as "the land of tyranny and blood" and "reached Columbia's favoured shores, Anno Domini 1800." After his arrival in Pennsylvania, Zesline married a young woman of German origin. He was called as minister to a Moravian congregation where he stayed for nine years. The "Angel of death received a commission from the throne of the Eternal to sever the conjugal bond which had subsisted between him and his first consort."

It was the custom of the Moravians to leave the ministry after the death of a wife and Zesline "resided amongst the brethren of that denomination in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania." Zesline was a minister for the Episcopalians for a short time and then with the Lutherans. In the summer of 1814 while in New Jersey he married Miss Sarah Upjohn who was of English descent, and he remained married to her until his death.

The Rev. Zesline was sent by the Lutheran Synod of Pennsylvania to perform duties of an evangelical missionary in Ohio and Kentucky. In the fall of 1814 he traveled to Cincinnati with his wife where he became the minister of the German Lutheran Church. "As a citizen Mr. Zesline possessed an unsullied reputation, undeviating probity, and a delicate sense of genuine honor. As a friend, he was frank, candid, generous and sincere. As a husband he was condescending\*, kind and affectionate: he loved his consort and was anxious to please and sedulous to gratify her. As a scholar his abilities were known only to a few of his intimate associates for he was so modest, diffident, and unassuming that his talents were concealed from the public in general. He understood the French, German, Latin, Greek and English languages. He occasionally preached in the English tongue, but usually in German. ... As a divine he was a man of evangelical sentiments, great moderation, and ardent love to the souls committed to his care. As a christian his religion was of the purifying and practical kind."

"A few days previous to his exit, in familiar conversation with some friends, he spoke of approaching death, with as much tranquility and pleasure as a person would speak of moving from a mean to a splendid residence." The Rev. Zesline said,

"All my dependence is in the atonement, the merits, the intercession of the glorious redeemer -- I know that my redeemer liveth -- I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day -- It is a distinguished honor to be enabled to bear a humble testimony to the power and efficacy of true religion to support and comfort me while suffering corporeal pain in the prospect of death. -- I shall soon be with Christ my blessed Savior -- There is nothing in this world worth living for; heaven is my home."

On Sunday, January 18, 1818, the Rev. Zesline "preached the gospel in the German tongue in the forenoon, and in English in the afternoon with more pathos and energy than usual. And on Monday the 19th he was seized by a violent inflammatory rheumatism." Neither physicians, relations, friends nor his wife could do anything to help him. "With scarcely a struggle and without a single groan he fell asleep in the embraces of his adorable Savior."

On Sunday, February 1 "at 3 o'clock PM the funeral procession consisting of some of the most respectable citizens of Cincinnati, was formed at the late residence of the deceased and moved thence to the first Presbyterian Church, where a sermon adapted to the occasion, on Luke 2nd Chapter 29, 30, 31, and 32 verses, was delivered to a very numerous, attentive and reputable assembly, from which place the procession, with slow solemnity, followed the sable\* hearse that bore the corpse to its gloomy dormitory, where it shall rest in peace until reanimated by the Archangel's voice, free from that complication of diseases, and all those pains which were the means of its dissolution."

\*Oxford English Dictionary Definitions:

condescending: Of a person of high (social) status, an employer, etc.: kind, indulgent, or benevolent to others of lower (social) status.

sable: The colour black; black clothing, also, esp. as a symbol of mourning.