

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED JAN 29 1980

DATE ENTERED

APR 22 1980

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

*The First Evangelical Reformed Church of Bernstadt*

AND/OR COMMON

Swiss Colony Church

**2 LOCATION**

*KY 80*

STREET & NUMBER

Kentucky State Route 80

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Bernstadt

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

5

STATE

Kentucky

VICINITY OF

CODE

021

COUNTY

Laurel

CODE

125

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

**PRESENT USE**

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

~~The First Evangelical Reformed Church~~

STREET & NUMBER

~~Kentucky State Route #80~~

CITY, TOWN

~~Bernstadt~~

VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Laurel County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

London

STATE

Kentucky

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky

DATE

1979 Supplement

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Kentucky Heritage Commission

CITY, TOWN

Frankfort

STATE

Kentucky

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Evangelical Reformed Church is located in the small community of Bernstadt (pop. 400, 1972 estimate), approximately six miles west of London, county seat of Laurel County, in southeast Kentucky near the Tennessee state line. The county is primarily rural and is situated in what is geophysically defined as the Cumberland Plateau.

Facing south toward Kentucky 80, the church sits on a slight rise within 100 feet of the rear of the 1956 brick building which now serves the congregation. Colony Road runs to the immediate west of the church and the old Kentucky 80 is directly in front. The building, constructed in 1884, is frame, 31 feet by 21 feet, with a gabled vestibule centered on the south facade. The west and east sides have three bays with 4/4 pane sash. The north wall has a rear door placed asymmetrically on the east end. Capping the gabled roof is a small louvered tower containing the original church bell.

The interior consists of one large room in addition to the entrance vestibule, with board and batten walls.

Nominated is a rectangular area that includes the building site and church "yard" now defined by wire fencing erected in 1975 for protective purposes. The fence extends approximately 30 feet from the east, west and north walls of the church, and approximately 10 feet from the front.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

## PERIOD

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1884

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The First Evangelical Reformed Church was built by Swiss immigrants who located in Bernstadt, Laurel County, Kentucky, during the late nineteenth century. This was the first systematic planned emigration project from a foreign country to Kentucky during this period and was probably the largest recruited enterprise of this type ever to take place in the state.<sup>1</sup> This church building remains as one of the few unaltered structures in this community surviving from the original Swiss settlement.

Laurel County, Kentucky was established in 1825, the eightieth county formed in the state.<sup>2</sup> It derived its name from the Laurel River which flows partly through the county. The topography of the area is elevated and generally rolling. At the time the Swiss settlers arrived, the staple grain products grown in this area were corn and oats and cattle and hogs were also raised on an extensive basis.

The Swiss colonists evidently had several reasons for selecting the Bernstadt region of Laurel County as an area preferable for colonization.<sup>3</sup> One was the climate. All of the settlers agreed that a better climate could not easily be found anywhere and cited the resulting good health of the colonists as proof of this. They were also well pleased with the excellent water supply which was available. Few of the local springs failed even in dry weather, an important consideration for farmers. The large amount of dew all summer also resulted in heavy growth of clover and other grasses that are essential to the maintenance of cattle and for cheesemaking, a craft in which the Swiss excell. The fact that the railroad was soon to be opened through this area would also be of advantage to the settlers in facilitating travel to Louisville, the greatest metropolitan center of Kentucky, and a potentially large market for their produce. In addition, the availability and reasonable cost of land was probably a factor because the Swiss rarely paid over one dollar per acre for their land purchases and did not intend to go deeply into debt. Within a year after the colonization company began its project, i.e., by 1882, the Swiss settlers had secured a total of 39,000 acres.<sup>4</sup> By that time they were approximately 562 persons in the settlement.

The promotion of the Swiss Colony Bernstadt had its beginning early in February, 1881, when a visit was made to Laurel County by Otto Bruner and Paul

(continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bruner, Otto. "History of the Swiss Colony." Bernstadt, Laurel County, Kentucky: No publisher given, October, 1881.

Collins, Richard H. History of Kentucky. 2 Vols. Covington, Kentucky: Richard H. Collins, 1874.

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. .12 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Bernstadt

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 116 749190 4115770  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B           
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

*See item 7*

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Calvin P. Jones, Historian; Gloria Mills, Historian; Jim Hays

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Kentucky Heritage Commission;

Sue Bennet

December 1979

STREET & NUMBER

College

TELEPHONE

104 Bridge Street

564-3741

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Frankfort

London

Kentucky

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS: *see rel. slip*

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL  *4/21/80*

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Adrian W. Hutton*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE 1-8-80

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*W. Ray Luce*  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
 ATTEST: *Kristin TO Connell*  
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 4/22/80

DATE 4/21/80

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Schenck, advance agents from Switzerland, and John R. Proctor, State Geologist of Kentucky who also held the unique and interesting title of State Commissioner of Immigration. Proctor had invited them to visit Kentucky with the object of colonization in mind and they spent approximately a year travelling through Kentucky and Tennessee on an investigative mission beginning in June, 1880.<sup>5</sup> By mid-1881 they had selected Laurel County and began to buy land. They purchased seed, equipment, provisions, and furniture in Louisville, and the emigration was well under way by the summer of 1881. The first settlers were several Swiss families who had originally intended to settle in West Virginia but became dissatisfied there.<sup>6</sup> They were soon followed by many other families from Switzerland itself. By January, 1886, at least 800 settlers had arrived. The colony prospered and was renowned for its prosperity and affluence which was primarily credited to the thrift, industry, and intelligence of the Swiss colonists.

The settlers established a church in their midst soon after the colonization began. The first organization of The First Evangelical Reformed Church at Bernstadt occurred on July 24, 1884 with construction initiated in October, 1884.<sup>7</sup> Many monetary donations were received from Louisville as well as song books, Bibles, and vessels for the taking of sacraments. The church building was dedicated on August 1, 1891. By April 1902, membership reached 196 with 123 of these adults and 73 children.

A new brick building was later constructed one hundred feet from the old church to house a growing congregation. However, the frame church is still maintained by the congregation and retains the original bell. Light is provided by kerosene lamps and heat is maintained by members of the Swiss Descendants Club and the congregation of the church.

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FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Russell Dyke, Laurel County, Kentucky (London, Kentucky: The Sentinel Echo, 1954), p. 182.

<sup>2</sup>Richard H. Collins, History of Kentucky (Covington, Kentucky: Richard H. Collins, 1874), Vol. II, p. 458.

<sup>3</sup>Otto Bruner, "History of the Swiss Colony" (Bernstadt, Laurel County, Kentucky: No publisher given, October, 1881), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Dyke, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup>Bruner, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Dyke, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup>Jesse Keller, "A History of the Swiss Church Located in Bernstadt, Laurel County, Kentucky," unpublished manuscript (London, Kentucky: Swiss Descendants Club, November 15, 1979), pp. 1-2.

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Dyke, Russell. Laurel County, Kentucky. London, Kentucky: The Sentinel Echo, 1954.

Keller, Jesse. "A History of the Swiss Church Located in Bernstadt, Laurel County, Kentucky." Unpublished manuscript, London, Kentucky: Swiss Descendants Club, November 15, 1979.