Address given at a service of Choral Holy Communion on the occasion of the 250th Anniversary of the Consecration of St. George's Church, also known as the Little Dutch (Deutsch) Church, 25th of April, 2011

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In 1761, the second day of Easter was the 23 March, a month earlier than in 2011. The "Foreign Protestant" congregation mainly comprised of Germans must have felt a deep sense of pride in welcoming Lieutenant-Governor Jonathan Belcher and other dignitaries to the consecration of their church.

The Foreign Protestants had been brought to Nova Scotia between 1750-52 to augment the English settlers who had arrived with Governor Edward Cornwallis to found Halifax. It is hard for us to imagine how hard those early years must have been. Most of the Foreign Protestants knew little or no English; from the beginning the English-speaking settlers referred to them as "Dutch" and the north suburbs where they were settled as "Dutchtown." Many were "redemptioners," in debt for their fares to John Dick, the agent who recruited them. These debts were assumed by the government, which meant that the Germans were required to meet their financial obligation by working on the fortifications in and around Halifax. Inexperience and lack of English meant that they were shamelessly cheated of rations by the commissary and the chief storekeeper, both of whom were eventually dismissed by Governor Cornwallis for "irregularities."

The first group of 250 German immigrants arrived on the ship *Ann* on the 13 July, 1750. They brought with them an epidemic, probably typhus, which threatened the entire settlement in Halifax. In 1751 three lots to be used "for a Burying Ground and Dutch Church" were assigned to the Foreign Protestant community. The pressing need for such a cemetery was graphically made clear by excavations under this building in 1996 and 1998 which exposed a mass grave of 30 bodies clearly dug in haste; examination of the remains have revealed that at least one person buried there was aboriginal.

By 1752 between 2,000 and 3,000 settlers, mainly Germans from the Rhineland, some Swiss and some French Protestants from the tiny principality of Montbéliard, had arrived in Halifax. After years of indecision, the authorities decided to settle the community in what was to become Lunenburg . Some Germans, however, did not leave Halifax, probably those who arrived in the first wave of migration and had been given lots in the "north suburb" in 1751. The German community that remained was augmented by returnees from Lunenburg when economic conditions improved during the Seven Years' War from 1756-63; in 1763 it included perhaps 250 people, or sixty-odd families.

The community, "by the united effort of voluntary hands" moved a small house to their burying ground in 1756, which they had obtained in exchange for some lumber. In Europe the dead were buried in or near churches; it is a poignant indication of their attachment to tradition, as well as devotion to the memory of those who died, that the Germans erected this church over the mass grave of 1751. For two years they worked to convert the house to a church. The Chaplain to the troops in Halifax conducted its first service, in German, at Whitsuntide, 1758. Enlarged between 1758-60 and given a spire containing a bell brought from the recently captured town of Louisbourg , the church was to have been consecrated in October, 1760 in the presence of Governor Charles Lawrence. His death put off the event until the following year. The choice of St. George, the patron saint of England, as the name for their church expressed the Germans' loyalty to the Crown, and was particularly appropriate with the accession of the youthful George III to the throne in October 1760.

As a chapel within St. Paul's parish, St. George's was consecrated by the rector of St. Paul's, the Rev. John Breynton . Breynton celebrated Holy Communion and spoke to the congregation in both English and German. According to one account, he also gave a third address in French. Breynton brought along the communion vessels used during the service. It was not until 1779 that the German congregation invested the substantial sum of 57 pounds, 2 shillings and 1 pence in "a silver can, a silver cup, one large and one small plate, in all four pieces." That they could afford such expensive vessels is obviously an indication of how far the community had come in the 27 years since Cornwallis' successor Governor Peregrine Hopson

had described the Germans who arrived in 1752 as "poor wretches that have scarce a farthing among them…"

One of the people who must have been relieved at the arrival of the St George's communion vessels, still in the possession of the church, was Dr Breynton. In the words of Canon Francis Partridge, "It was probably a troublesome thing for the Rector of St. Paul's to carry with him the holy vessels every time he went to St. George's to celebrate the Holy Mysteries." We are fortunate today to have with us today not only Dr Breynton's successor, Dr Paul Friesen, but St. Paul's own 18th century silver communion vessels, which will be used at today's service. Although not the ones that would have been brought by Dr Breynton in 1761, they remind us that the Rector of St. Paul's visited St. George's three or four times a year to celebrate Holy Communion until the Rev. Bernard Houseal, a Loyalist refugee, began to serve the congregation in 1785.

Historians are not supposed to be fanciful, but I imagine the Germans, participating in the consecration of their church on the first day after Easter, must have remembered the sufferings they had undergone during their early years in Nova Scotia, and how their community had survived adversity in a new and strange land. Rebirth was an immediate reality for those present 250 years ago; it was only fitting that they placed at the top of their prized steeple, a cockerel, symbol of resurrection.