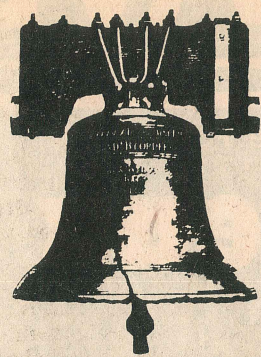
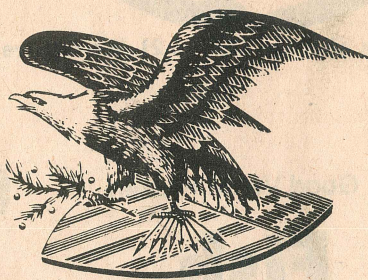


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1776-1976

"Rememberances of Days Gone By"

History of St. John's Lutheran Church

St. John's Lutheran Church will be celebrating its 116th birthday since its founding on Oct. 18, 1859 by Swedish immigrants. The beginning of St. John's Lutheran Church dates back to May of 1846 when a party of 42 persons, from various parts of Ostergotland, Sweden, embarked for America aboard the freight sailship, "Augusta" from Gothenberg. A voyage of nine weeks and three days ensued before the boat landed in New York harbor. After a brief stay in New York, the immigrants started north up the Hudson Bay to Albany, then through the Erie Canal to Toledo, Ohio. They then passed through Cincinnati, Cairo, Ill., and St. Louis, Mo. before settling in Boone County, Iowa in what is now the Madrid area.

In the previous year, 1845, Peter Cassel, another Swedish immigrant, established a settlement in Jefferson county calling it New Sweden. He continued to correspond with his friends in Sweden telling them about the good opportunities and bright future available to them in the new land.

He urged more people to come to America and sent instructions along telling them how to find his settlement. The group arriving in 1846 took a wrong turn at the fork in the river and ended up following the Skunk River into Fort Des Moines. Magnus Anderson and Jacob Nelson had purchased a team and wagon for hauling trunks and household supplies in Keokuk and they and several other men hired to haul the immigrants' belongings. The trip was long and tiring as they plodded over the wild, unsettled country in search of their fellow countrymen.

They arrived at what they thought was their destination in September of 1846, but instead of being greeted by a settlement of men and countrymen, they found only one white man living alone in the woods. His name was Charles Gaston, a native of Pennsylvania and former soldier. Mr. Gaston had passed through the area and was so impressed with the region, that he decided to stay and establish a home in the area that came to be known as Elk Rapids.

Many hardships and sacrifices were endured by these early pioneers. Wild Indians roamed the prairies in search of plunder, striking fear in the hearts of the new settlers. Wild game, natural fruit and food were abundant on the new and unsettled land but stores or mills were not near. The settlers had to venture to Oskaloosa, Burlington or Keokuk for provisions when the need arose. Travel was slow and tedious by ox and wagon. A trip to Keokuk took over three weeks so one can see that the trips were few and far between.

With hands accustomed to work, and minds full of courage and hope, they began to till the new soil. Ground breaking and plowing was done in spring with picks and spades and grain was ground between two large flat stones or it was beat with a large club after having been placed in a hollow stump. Jacob Nelson was the first area farmer to possess a hand mill for grinding grain and this device was used by neighbors as far away as Stratford.

In 1849, three new families, Anders Peterson, C. J. Cassel and Carl Anderson joined the new settlement. Anderson built the first log cabin in 1851 and it was around this time that the name of the community was changed from Swede Point to Madrid.

In spite of the adversities, and hardships, the people were still very diligent in the study of God's word and the sacraments, Bibles, postils, hymn books and other books of devotion brought by the settlers to be used in their Sunday worship. The holy day was kept sacred by the Swedes and no work was done on it at all. Works of Luther, Hoof, Murbeck and Linderoth were writers of commonly used study material. Lutheran ceremonies were simply performed and rituals such as baptisms and funerals were as elaborate as the individual's spiritual needs.

They met regularly every Sunday at someone's home for services where Jacob Nelson served as acting pastor. At times there was extemporaneous speaking or discussion on various Bible verses. Later on, the services were held at the Carl Anderson home, which is currently the site of the Church of God parsonage.

In 1854, the settlement was first visited by a Swedish pastor, M. F. Hokanson. He traveled by horseback from New Sweden to Swede Point at certain intervals throughout the year to be with his fellow countrymen and help them understand what God intended them to do.

Organization of St. John's

Under the leadership of Pastor Hokanson, the new church was organized on October 18, 1859 with thirteen families or 36 communicants and their children forming the charter membership. Members forming the institution were Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Dalander, Zachariah, Erick and Anna, Mr. and Mrs. Erick Dalander, John, Anna and Clara, Mr. and Mrs. Swain Dalander, Mathilda and Amanda, Mr. and Mrs. Anders Carlson, Carl Mathilda, Hedda and Eric; Ingrid Johnson; Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Cassel, Mathilda, Ulla, Clara, Johannah, John and Peter; Mr. and Mrs. John Anderson and John Peter; Mr. and Mrs. Anders Anderson, Magnus and Mary; Mr. and Mrs. Peter J. Armstrong, A. Fred and Christina; Mr. and Mrs. Nels Christofferson; Mrs. Greta Johnson, Anders and Mathilda; Mrs. Kathrina Nelson, Nels, Magdalena and Louisa; Mr. and Mrs. Peter Peterson, Peter Olaf and Maria and Carl Anderson.

The church's first confirmation class in 1860 consisted of three members and Rev. Hokanson was hired as the first pastor receiving \$150 a year, with board and 13 cords of wood.

Talk of erecting a church building was discussed in November, 1868. At this time a document was sent around to each member asking them to write down what they could donate in time, effort or material towards the new church. Results showed 96 days of work promised to the church and 22,695 feet of lumber that would be donated and used for the building. Each member also agreed to pay one dollar going towards the church each year until it was completed and paid for.

Rev. Hokanson remained pastor of the new church until 1868, at which time he moved to Bergholm near Ottumwa. C. J. Cassel assumed the roll of pastor until one could be obtained.

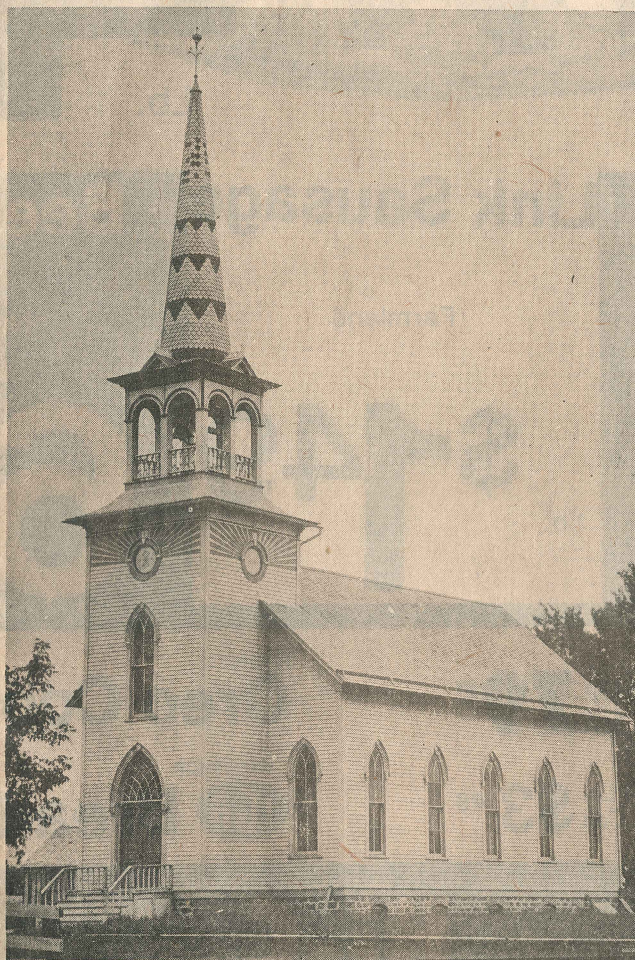


This photo shows the first St. John's Lutheran Church as it looked when it was constructed in 1868. The building was constructed of native lumber and had the following dimensions: 50 ft. long, 30 ft. wide and 20 ft. high from floor to ceiling. It had a vestibule with a stairway on the north side leading to a small balcony. A 60 ft. spire in the shape of an unfolded lily was on top. This spire is currently in the Augustana College Museum.

At the annual meeting in May, 1868, it was decided that a church should be built of native lumber 50 feet long, 30 feet wide and 20 feet high from floor to ceiling. A vestibule, with a stairway on the north side was added and from the roof, a 60 ft. steeple with a spire in the shape of an unfolded lily. On the stem was a sign reading "peace and good will to men." The spire has been preserved and is on display at the Augustana College museum. The structure, completed in 1870 cost \$3000 with the ground for the new church and parsonage donated by the Dalander family. On August 27, 1871, the church acquired a 500 lb. bell and it was officially dedicated on this day.

A custom of the early Lutheran Church as the seating of the men on the right side and the women and smaller children seated on the left. This practice was discontinued at the turn of the century.

In 1874, the minister at Swede Point preached every third Sunday at the Hook's Point Lutheran Church (now Stratford). The two churches were made one pastorate with the pastor's salary set at \$450.



This is the second church as it looked in 1881. An acre of ground was purchased for \$125 on which the new parsonage was built. The new parsonage cost \$2000 while the pastor's salary was \$500 a year, plus necessary feed for the animals. The church was moved to its present location in 1892.

An acre of ground was purchased in 1881 for \$1.25 on which the new parsonage was built. The old parsonage was sold for \$660 while total expenses for the new one was \$2000. Pastor's salary at this time was raised to \$500 per year with feed for the necessary animals included. Membership dues were established by 1180 with men paying \$5 per year and women \$3. By 1884 they were raised to \$6 and \$4 respectively.

The church was moved to its present location in 1892 when a full basement, larger tower, circle back of the

pulpit were built and a furnace was installed. A pipe organ was purchased in 1908.

At the turn of the century, the morning church services were still being conducted in the native Swedish language. Only the fourth Sunday evening service was in English. In 1907 at the annual meeting it was decided to have English services every other Sunday and two English communions during the year. Following the proclamation of Governor Harding in 1919, regarding the use of foreign languages, all Sunday School classes were given in English.

Women held and remained a minority position in the church until 1922, when at this time, their election votes were counted for the initial time.

Dr. Siljestrom organized the first choir at St. John's and in 1870, the Sunday School class began, organized by J. Telleen, then a theologian in charge of the Swedish Lutheran Church in Des Moines.

For a long period of time, all church expenses, pastor's salary, etc. were determined at the beginning of the year following a free subscription. This continued until 1881 when the subscription plan was abolished and the communicant fee came about.

A new \$40,000 church edifice was erected in 1924. The new church was 50 x 78 with arcade and steps extending 20½ feet. It had a seating capacity of 400 and at this time the pipe organ was reconstructed and built into the church. The church remained unchanged until 1959 when the white pillars were removed and the steps were rebuilt.

The last services in the old church were held on September 28, 1924. The Christmas morning Julotta service marked the initial service held in the new structure. Dedication services were held February 1, 1925.

Since that time, a new organ has been purchased and a new wing has been added to the church.

The new wing was added to the church in 1967 with Ernie Lawson the contractor for the project. Cost of the new fellowship wing was \$90,000.

It includes a pastor's office, 30' x 40' fellowship room and eight classrooms.

At this same time, a 26 car parking lot was constructed on the south side of the church.



This is St. John's Lutheran Church as it appears today. This structure was built in 1924 at a cost of \$40,000. The church was 50 x 78 with arcade and steps extending 20½ ft. The picture shown above was taken in 1959 following the Centennial Anniversary Celebration.