

EVANGELICAL GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH OF NEAR HICKORY



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EVANGELICAL GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

In the 1870's and 1880's a "wave" of German migration came to Mt. Pleasant Township. Many of their descendants still reside here. Some German families who came were the Ahrns, Alrutz, Brinkman, Carl, Colwes, Creps, Gundlah, Kaste, Kinemond, Knauer, Kraeer, Kreikemeyer, Miller, Nolte, Raab, Retzer, Rustemeir, Shafer, Seabright, Seik, Somerlade, Vogle, Walker, Weineke, Weigman and Rasel's. Most of these German immigrants were farmers and they took up this occupation upon arriving here.

The Knauer Family were outstanding in that three of the sons secured educations and became professional men. But Christian Knauer was content to remain a tiller of the soil, and in a sense, he maintained a home in the Hickory Community for the rest of the family. Although his farm was small, he tilled it faithfully and made a good living on it for his wife and family. He was too, a good citizen and was greatly interested in the welfare of his family, friends and neighbors.

In addition to their other good qualities, these people of German descent were religious, and they brought with them to the Community their desire to have a church of their own, and in the spirit of other earlier immigrants, to worship God in their own way. So, as soon as a sufficient number of families had settled here to form a church organization, there was organized in 1887, under the direction of the Reverend Dittmyer of Carnegie the Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church to provide services for these people. At first they held services in the McCarrell School-house, and since this was a convenient location, they purchased an adjoining lot of ground from Mr. A. V. McGugin and on it they erected a church building and a manse as a residence for their minister. In this church, services were held for nearly fifty years.

In order to most effectively minister to the older German residents here, for a number of years the services were held using the German language; then a plan was used, somewhat in deference to the younger members, to alternate services, using the English and German languages time about and, in later years of the congregation's existence, since the older members had all passed away, English was used exclusively in the services. Gradually it was being realized that the days of this congregation were numbered, as the older members had passed away, the younger members had married and in some cases moved to other communities, and some of the group had affiliated with one or the other of the Presbyterian Churches in the area, with Mt. Prospect of Upper Buffalo, etc.

So, by the late 1940's the situation arose where only afternoon services could be held on Sundays conducted by the Reverend F. S. Eberle who was then pastor of the St. Paul's Lutheran Church on Canonsburg and who was serving also, as pastor of this small

country congregation. These services terminated about 1950, and in the early 1950's, the church building was sold to the Miller's Run Grange who moved the materials to the site of their Grange Hall on Route 50 in Cecil Township and used them in the erection of their new Grange Hall. The parsonage also was sold to an individual buyer, and sometime later the land on which these buildings stood reverted to Mr. James A. McGugin, whose father had furnished the land for this Church back in 1887. On this site is now located the home of Mr. & Mrs. James R. Phillips, Mr. Phillips being a grandson of Mr. James A. McGugin. After the dissolution of this congregation, the few remaining members affiliated with other nearby Lutheran churches.

As mentioned earlier, the migrating generation of these German people were, almost without exception, tillers of the soil. Some of the present members of these families still follow this vocation, but among the succeeding generations can be found people engaged in most of the occupations practiced in this area. These people have contributed immeasurably to the economy of the Mt. Pleasant Township Community and have here taken their places to the betterment of themselves and to the entire Community.

One other member of this group whom we will here mention briefly was the well-known shoe-maker of Hickory, Joe Wittman. Mr. Wittman was born in Munich, Bavaria in 1869 and there he learned and followed his father's occupation of shoe-making. He was engaged, as a young man, in the War of 1886 between Bavaria and Bohemia, and in that conflict he suffered a broken leg when his horse fell on him. Recovering from the injury after many weeks, he was given a furlough of two years, engaging again in the shoe-making trade. He was married on April 1, 1887 and shortly afterward he was informed that he must serve two more years in the army. To avoid that service, he migrated to America in September 1887. His wife expected to follow him here, but she became ill and died later that year.

Arriving at Hickory, Joe Wittman took employment with the village shoe-maker Joseph Hemphill and worked with him for three years. In April 1891, he went to the farm of Mr. Louis H. Ahrns, another man of German descent, and he worked there until 1899, when he returned to his native land on a visit. On coming back to the Hickory Community a year and a half later, he went back to the Ahrns farm where he lived and worked until 1906, when, upon the death of Mr. Hemphill, he purchased his shop and conducted it for a five-year period.

He then was employed as a cook on the Pennsylvania Railroad, traveling with a work-train crew throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. He then returned to the Ahrns farm, now just like home to him, in 1915 for another stint of fifteen years of farm work. In April 1930, he opened a shoe shop in the McPeak Hall in Hickory, and later that year he moved to his own shop on the Moore property in the Village. There he carried on in this occupation until his death in 1939 when he was 74 years old.

History of the Evangelical Trinity Lutheran Church of Mount Pleasant
Township, Washington County, Pennsylvania.

by Mr. Lewis H. Ahrns

It is appropriate for an occasion of this kind that a history of the congregation be given. Unfortunately, however, most of the records of this congregation have been lost, making it impossible to write a detailed history of it. Nevertheless, the general facts have been obtained from the recollections of some of our older members.

In and before the year 1870, a number of German Lutheran families settled down in this part of Washington County. They were a poor, but industrious class of people, and although the conditions for their establishing homes of their own at that time were unfavorable, it soon became evident that they were to become permanent settlers here. Their spiritual welfare was first looked after by the Rev. Mr. Schweigert who served the people here in connection with his regular charge at Kittaning, Pennsylvania, preaching alternately in the Bulger and McCarrell School-houses. Due to his increasing feebleness, together with the great distance involved in traveling here from Kittaning, the Rev. Mr. Schwegert, after serving the people for five years, turned over his charge to the Rev. G. C. Friederich of Washington, who also served for five years. In the year 1880, the Rev. Bauman of Pittsburgh took charge of the field here and served until his death in 1886.

By this time, the little mission had grown in strength, and the people felt that they would like to have a pastor of their own. They communicated with the office of the Joint Synod of Ohio, and the Rev. E. T. Dittmer was instructed to look after the field temporarily, and, if possible, to effect an organization, build a church, call a pastor, etc. In a very short while, a congregation was organized under the name of the German Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Congregation of Hickory, Pennsylvania. A constitution was drawn up and adopted and signed by 28 members. The signatures were of the

following persons: Fred Colwes, George Wiegman, August Carl, Carl Gundlah, Herman Kaste, Henry Engreke, Henry Borchot, Herman Somerlade, Lewis Ahrns, August Seabright, William Seabright, Fred Kreikemeyer, Henry Nolte, August Wieneke, Henry Ahrns, Fred Knauer, William Gundlah, Charles Seik, Henry Kinemond, Charles Knauer, Gustav Bahre, Ernest Dittmyer, Adolph Seabright, Christ Knauer, Fred Klages. Ten of these are still living (in 1911). These 26 (or 28) voting members, together with their families, constituted the first German Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Congregation of Hickory.

After the congregation had been formally organized, steps were taken to erect a church building. The members themselves did the bulk of the work, and soon a modest, but neat little church stood here, erected for the purpose of worshipping their Lord and Maker. The church was dedicated on the 28th day of August, 1887 by the Rev. E. T. Dittmyer of Carnegie, and the Rev. H. J. Schuck of North Side, Pittsburgh, both of whom we are pleased to have with us on this occasion.

On the first of September, 1887, the Rev. Henry Wellhauser was installed as the first regular pastor of the congregation. He labored on the field for two years and was then succeeded by the Rev. Haur Friedrich, who served the congregation until the fall of 1891. After being without a pastor for a few months, we extended a call to the Rev. George Weining, whose career in the congregation was short, but active. During this time, an organ was purchased and a choir as also a Young Peoples' Society was organized. Unfortunately, the Rev. Mr. Weining failed in health and was forced to resign after serving for only one year.

In the spring of 1892, the Rev. Herman Zirl was called as pastor of the congregation, and he labored in the field for four years. During his pastorate, an occasional English service for the benefit of the younger members of the congregation was held. Since it was felt by some that this need for recognition of the growing numbers of young people be given, it was requested that one service a month be held, using the English language, but the request was promptly refused. This unfortunately, caused a break in the congregation, and its strength was considerably diminished by the loss to other churches of some of our younger members, who claimed that they were unable to understand the German language.

After the resignation of the Rev. Mr. Zirl, a resolution which had been refused shortly before, passed, the congregation hoping thereby to

recover from their loss. This hope was only partially realized. It was then resolved to call a pastor who would be able to master both the German and the English languages.

The Rev. J. W. Born was next called, and he served the congregation for fourteen years. For a while, everything went along smoothly and peacefully until the language question again created difficulties. The English part of the congregation who had grown in numbers felt that they were entitled to half of the services in their language, and a resolution was again passed that the services be held alternately in German and in English, with the amendment that this arrangement should remain as long as there were six members who preferred the German language service.

In the year, 1906, a parsonage was built, the congregation having heretofore rented a house for use of the pastor. On the 15th of October, 1910, the Rev. Mr. Born felt constrained to resign the pastorate on account of ill health. During the next six months, the field was again taken care of by the Rev. E. J. Dittmyer of Carnegie, until he was installed as pastor on July 4, 1911.

During its existence of twenty-five years, this congregation had had some very discouraging experiences. Some of its pastors did not seem to have the welfare of the congregation at heart. Financial difficulties proved a hindrance to the growth of the Church and its interests, but the language question has been the chief bone of contention, and it is still awaiting a solution satisfactory to everyone. Nevertheless, a few faithful workers, whilst bemoaning their losses and set-backs, are still laboring for the welfare of our Church, striving for peace and willing to sacrifice their own wishes and desires in order that Trinity Church may yet become a congregation acceptable to God and instrumental for the salvation of human souls. May God Bless their efforts, that we may realize a more prosperous twenty-five years in the future than we have experienced in the past.

This paper, obviously describing the first twenty-five years of the congregation, must have been read at an anniversary occasion, sometime in 1911, thus describing the history of the congregation since its founding in 1886.

In later years, and until its disorganization, the congregation was served by the Rev. Forrest S. Eberle, who was pastor, also, of the St. Paul Lutheran Church of Canonsburg. After his retirement, Mr. and

Mrs. Eberle built a home near that of their son, Paul J. Eberle about two miles south of the site of Trinity Church. Mr. Eberle is deceased but Mrs. Eberle still lives in that home.

The land on which Trinity Church was located had been deeded to the congregation by Mr. Alexander V. McGugin for what it cost him to convey the land, and with the stipulation, if the congregation ever was disbanded, that the land revert to the original owner or his successor, so when the congregation disbanded, the land on which the church was located reverted to Mrs. Ruth Paul Snyder who then owned the adjoining land. Mr. A. V. McGugin also made a donation of fifty dollars to the congregation, in connection with conveying the land. When the parsonage was built, a small parcel of land was bought from Mr. Gus Bahre.

After the disorganization of this congregation, the church and parsonage buildings were sold to Millers' Run Grange, and they were torn down and the materials were used by this Grange to erect their new Grange Hall near Venice in Cecil Township. The land on which Trinity Church stood is now occupied by the new home of Mr. and Mrs. James R. Phillips and Family.

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