

Glimpses

of
St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

By Dorothea Darkow



George Pfeifer, Sr.



Mrs. George Pfeifer



Christian Bohn



Mrs. Christian Bohn



Mrs. Louise Bohn Franke

During the year-long celebration of the 150th Anniversary of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church of Springfield, PA., issues of Glimpses will review events in our history and introduce some of the dedicated pastors and laymen who served the congregation. Members who attended "old" St. John, as well as those who are familiar with the early years in Springfield, will be asked to share their memories. It is hoped that a knowledge of the congregation's roots, struggles, and accomplishments achieved through God's divine help and grace will be an inspiration for the future.

Sources of information are the St. Johns historical outlines prepared in 1923 and 1938, a news clipping dated 1947, articles prepared by Loretta Donahue and Dee Howarth in 1973 and Pastor Liefeld in 1983 and 1993.

The decade of the 19th century during which the congregation was established was a time of rapid growth. There was a dynamic growth of manufacturing in east coast cities. America was viewed as a land of new opportunity and religious freedom. Ireland and Germany led as sources of immigration. The new states of Florida, Texas, Iowa and Wisconsin experienced rapid expansion of population and development as settlers streamed into the territories west of the Mississippi. These were the years of the Gold Rush and migration to Oregon. On the political scene the issue of slavery was becoming more divisive as attempts at compromise between the different viewpoints failed.

We know little of the personal lives of the original members of St. John or their position in the community. It is recorded that they were immigrants from the Alsace region of Germany. It is evident they were devoted to Scripture as interpreted in Lutheran doctrine. Pastor Liefeld wrote for the 145th anniversary, "the congregation was born in the midst of controversy." These nine members, four couples and a relative, were not in accord with "the doctrinal laxity" of the Zionskirche on Franklin Square which had been founded by Rev. H. M. Muhlenberg almost a hundred years earlier. (Today Franklin Square is south of the Vine Street Expressway between 6th and 7th Sts.) They severed their association with Zion in 1840. Their earliest attempts to establish a new congregation were beset with problems and they disbanded when their first pastor proved unfaithful.



Philip Bohn



Mrs. Philip Bohn



Philip Toussaint



Mrs. Philip Toussaint



Pastor G. Schaller
1848 - 1850

In 1845 one member, George Pfeiffer, was sent a copy of the "Lutheraner" from a friend in St. Louis. The group found agreement with the writings of Dr. Carl Ferdinand Walther, a spokesman for the Lutheran Saxons who had settled in Missouri in 1838-1839. Given new courage, they pursued suggested contacts with pastors in New York and Maryland. For the next three years Rev. Theodor Brohm of New York, Rev. F. C. D. Wyneken in Baltimore and Missionary Hoyer in Maryland served the Philadelphia flock "with more or less regularity".

On Ascension Day, June 1, 1848 the congregation adopted sixteen articles as a preliminary constitution and the parish was established. At the same time they resolved to apply for membership in the Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States. Membership was granted in July 1848.

The founders included Mr. and Mrs. George Pfeifer Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Christian Bohn, Mrs. Louise Bohn Franke, Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Bohn, and Mr. and Mrs. Philip Toussaint.

The members were unsuccessful at first in obtaining a pastor from Germany so a pastor from Lafayette County, MO, The Rev. Franke was called. However, the Missouri congregation pleaded with them not to take their pastor. Subsequently they learned that a vicar from Windsbach, Bavaria had arrived in New York and a call was sent to him. The Rev. G. Schaller became the first resident pastor in November 1848. Services of the infant congregation were held in Pastor Schaller's home on Fourth Street below Federal Street. Unfortunately they soon discovered that they were unable to adequately support their new pastor and in 1850 he moved on to Baltimore.



In the next issue of Glimpses we will learn how Missionary Hoyer again came to the assistance of the flock in the fall of 1850. The April issue of *The Lutheran Witness* describes the work of Pastors C. F. W. Walther and F. C. D. Wyneken (the same one who helped serve St. John) along with other materials related to the 150th Anniversary of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.



St. John's Church 1874

St. John 150 Years!

