

Glimpses

of
St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

By Ivan Quandt

In the first 3 issues of St. John's "Glimpses", the first twenty years of this congregation were reviewed. Founded in 1848, the church was served briefly by each of 4 pastors during this short time period. Pastor Schaller left already in 1850 because the congregation couldn't support him and the following pastors left for health reasons - Pastor Hoyer in 1858, Pastor Sommer in 1861, and Pastor Keyl in 1868. In this issue, the story of only one pastor will be told, but it is a long story in the history of St. John Lutheran Church.

Possibly the members of St. John found their predicament in 1868 to be very frustrating. The fourth vacancy in just over twenty years was probably not viewed as a blessing. The frustration was increased by the difficulty of finding a new pastor. Calls were extended to a number of men, but they were all returned and 1868 ended without a pastor. Finally, in March of the following year, a call was accepted. The Rev. Olaf Schroeder of Ottendorf, Hanover, Germany moved to America and was installed as the fifth pastor of St. John on April 4, 1869.

In A Century of Faith, a history of the congregation from 1848 to 1948, Pastor Schroeder was described as "a Spiritual adviser and father." The document goes on to say, "Under his consecrated leadership... the fulfillment of many dreams was realized." A most obvious sign of his success in nurturing the congregation was the need for a larger house of worship.

The membership of St. John grew quickly in the early seventies. The old church building on Carpenter Street grew too small for the increasing number of worshippers. There was much discussion about a new building, but there was a mortgage on the property on Carpenter Street that had not been paid. There was no organization like a church extension fund from which the congregation could borrow money. But, a way was found. George Winneberger, Sr., a long term treasurer of St. John, was given the credit for finding a way to pay off the mortgage and Pastor Schroeder personally contacted congregations throughout the synod to secure loans for a building program.



Pastor Olaf Schroeder



George Winneberger, Sr.

There were no further barriers to overcome - a new house of worship could be built.

The congregation decided, for a variety of reasons, that the site on Carpenter Street was not the best one to continue the work of the church. A search for property was undertaken and a decision was made to buy an available lot on Wharton Street near Sixth in an area of Philadelphia known as Southwark. The property was purchased for \$8,000. As the new building began to take form and construction costs became due, two members saved the day by personally offering collateral for the needed loans, Theodore Miller, the building committee chairperson, and Michael Fritz.



Theodore Miller



Michael Fritz

God blessed the construction work and finally it was completed. In the fall of 1872, the new house of worship was dedicated to the service of God.

Now even more, the congregation grew and flourished. Hundreds of Germans living in Southwark found in Pastor Schroeder a trustworthy Spiritual advisor. A St. John's historian, writing in 1923, credits him with a strong personality, deep learning and piety, modesty to a fault, pastoral wisdom, benevolence and kindness. These qualities attracted many people to membership in the church.

About the time the new building

was completed, St. John Lutheran School had increased its enrollment to 104, so a second teacher was called. When the budget would no longer support a second teacher, Pastor Schroeder took over the classroom and fulfilled both pastor and teacher positions for 6 years. Eventually, the school was again reduced to one teacher.

It was an illness that forced Pastor to stop teaching in 1882, but an illness from which he evidently recovered. Not long after the turn of the century, however, this well loved pastor became victim of an illness from which he was not to recover. His last years saw his strength rapidly leaving him. He never resigned his position at St. John, but in 1905 God called him home. His body was laid to rest in Northwood Cemetery.

For 36 years, Pastor Schroeder served the congregation well, almost twice as long as all 4 of his predecessors combined. He was long remembered with love and respect. The historian in 1923 reported, "Today still, eighteen years after his departure, St. John's is still known as 'Schroeder's Church'."



St. Johns Lutheran Church on Wharton Street