

ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Written by. Ed. P. Troxel
for the 50th. anniversary
September 17, 1932

The earliest incident that we have at hand, leading up to the establishment of what is now the St. John's Lutheran Church in Clay Township, occurred in the year 1864 (the year I was born) and was related to me, by my father some years before he died.

There was a man by the name of Levi Reppert lived two miles west and one fourth mile south of here on what was then and is yet known as the "Dayton Road", so called because it was probably the only road by which people could travel North and Northeast from Dayton.

Father told me, Mr. Reppert noticed a certain horse-man riding by at regular intervals and he began to wonder what his business might be, I do not remember whether he said, Mr. Reppert planned to stop the man on one of his regular passings or whether he stopped on his own accord, however, one day they met and in the conversation that followed Mr. Reppert learned that the man's name was James Liebert, that he was a preacher of the Reformed Church, that he lived at Dayton, that he preached at Colburn and that the occasions of his passing back and forth was to fill his appointments at the latter place. (not known if he was a relative of these Lieberts)

Mr. Reppert had a daughter about my age and when he found the man was a Reformed pastor, he expressed a desire to have her baptized. In further conversation, the Rev. Liebert, on learning that there were quite a large number of Lutheran and Reformed families living in the community, said if a preaching point could be established in this community, he would discontinue his trips to Colburn and preach here; Mr. Reppert, who was a close friend of my fathers, told what he had learned and he also having a desire to have me baptized, the two evidently began to talk the matter over with their neighbors which resulted in arranging a preaching service for the Rev. Leibert in Schnecks School House which stood one mile west and one-half mile south from here, and evidently it was at that service that I and Mr. Reppert's daughter and possibly other children were baptized. The only thing I could find that could be construed as a record of the time and place of that service is my Baptism Certificate and it says I was baptized on the 7th. of August, 1864 at the Schnecks School House by the Rev. James Leibert, pastor of the Reformed Church. My conclusion is that the Rev. James Leibert on the 7th. day of August, 1864, conducted the first service for what developed into the St. John's Union Lutheran and Reformed Church, at Schnecks School House. So much as to the first service.

We will now, turn to the organization of the church, here, on account of the absence of any records, we are as much in the dark as we were as to the first service; When we are asked when our church was organized we usually

say about the year 1865, and I think that is at least approximately correct; It appears that the Rev. Leibert sometime after that first service on August 7, 1864, changed his place of residence from Dayton to Rossville, which already had a Union Lutheran and Reformed Church, Mr. John Clauser tells me that the Rev. Leibert conducted the funeral of his only sister and that he came from Rossville, the inscription on her tombstone says she died on the 31st. day of March, 1866, so I infer St. John's congregation was organized sometime between the 7th. day of August, 1864 and the 31st. day of March, 1866 and that the Rev. James Leibert, a Reformed preacher was its first pastor, for how long I cannot say, I find that in 1867, the Rev. Homberger a minister of the Lutheran Church was located at Rossville and confirmed a class of catechism including a number from this community, one of whom Mrs. Jody Rodenbarger is still a member here; but whether he preached at St. Johns, I do not know.

In the beginning, St. John's was served by pastors residing at Rossville; they also serving the churches already established at Mulberry, Fair Haven and Oxford. These churches, I think were like St. John's at first, all Union Churches, sometimes served by either a Lutheran or a Reformed pastor alone, then again at times by one of both at the same time.

Sometime in the latter sixties, the Rev. Nevin Kessler, a Reformed pastor was called to Rossville, to serve these churches, and it was during the early part of his pastorate that the old Schnecks School House was abandoned and a new brick building put up 1/4 mile west of the old, it being

named and henceforth known as the Egypt School House, there St. John continued to worship until this house was built.

It was also under this pastorate that the first efforts were made to secure ground for a burying place and upon which to build a church, those efforts form the first recorded acts we could find under date of June 4th. 1869, we have the following:

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As a result of that canvass the sum of \$53.70 was secured, Next item on record,

March 7th, 1870, Cemetery bought, deed made and recorded, Jacob Bower to Wm. Burkhalter Etal. Neither the size of the plot of ground purchased nor the amount paid is stated but presumably it was the sum pledged.

Along in the early seventies, the congregation at Rossville, because of the inconvenient location of its church and the organization of a Union Reformed and Lutheran Church at St. Lukes, a few miles on this side of Frankfort, became greatly weakened and was finally disbanded, the place of residence of the pastors was then changed from Rossville to Mulberry; the Rev. Kessler continued to serve St. John's from Mulberry until about 1873 and the other Reformed Churches in what is now the Mulberry Parish until 1879 when he died.

In 1872 or 73, the Mulberry Parish of the Lutheran Church called the Rev. J.J. Kuntz, who served until 1881 and was followed by a short pastorate of the Rev. Madison C. Peters,

a Reformed pastor. He was followed by the Rev. Geo. Harter, a Lutheran pastor called to the Mulberry parish of the Lutheran Church, At about this time, St. John's, which up to that time had been a Union congregation under one organization now divided into two organizations, the Lutheran being served by the Rev. Harter, the Reformed and by the Rev. Kander who had been called to the Mulberry parish of the Reformed Church, and it was under the pastorate of these two that St. Johns Church was built.

On January 7, 1833, the officers and members of the Lutheran and Reformed churches met in the carpenter shop of T.F. Paul, for the purpose of making plans and specifications to build a church, after completing and adopting the plans, Mr. Wm. Burkhalter, Mr. Joshua Frey, and Mr. Ephriam P. Troxel, the Trustees were also, as you will notice on the corner stone, selected as the building committee; a number of solicitors were appointed to canvass this and the surrounding communities for the necessary funds; as a result the sum of \$1272.00 was secured in this community and \$466.75 in those surrounding, total \$1738.75.

Work was to begin and the pledges become binding as soon as \$1200.00 had been pledged; one half to be paid in sixty days, the other half when the church was completed. Seventy-six persons in this community made pledges, of that number fourteen are still living, only one is now a member of this church.

On March 17, 1883, the builders contracted with T.F. Paul to build the St. John's Church for the sum of \$1324.65, the work to be completed in October, 1883.

When the builders came to locate the church, they found to build it on the ground purchased for the purpose, would throw it too far west toward the hillside. So, Mr. David Wetzel and wife donated this little plot upon which the church now stand, thus leaving a better approach to the cemetery.

There is no record of either the corner stone laying or the Dedication of the Church, but since the work was to be started as soon as conditions permitted, I judge it took place in April or early May, and since the work was to be finished in October, I would guess the dedication took place some time in November, Rev. Harter and Rev. Kander officiated at both the corner stone laying and the dedication.

The Rev. Harter continued to serve the Lutheran congregation until 1887, about the end of his pastorate there came a division or readjustment of parishes among the Lutherans. Mulberry with Fair Haven forming the Mulberry Parish; Oxford, (now Bethel) and St. John's were joined with Zion's at Colburn forming the Colburn parish. Rev. A.V. House already at Colburn began serving St. Johns after Rev. Harter; serving until 1889 and was followed by Rev. J.A. Boord, 1890 to 91. In 1892, Rev. M.J. Stirewalt was called, serving until 1894 after which came the following in their order, Rev. G.D. Gross, 1894 to 99; Rev. P.C. Wike, 1899 to 1905;

Rev. E.P. Conrad, 1905 to 1914; Rev. B.L. Stroup, 1915 to 1920; Rev. J.H. Schmidt from Feb. 1920 to Sept. 1920; Rev. W.E. Allen first called as student supply 1920 to 1931; Rev. W.E. Webber, now our pastor, 1931.

In 1922, the Reformed people discontinued services here, disbanded their congregation and deeded their interest in the property to the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The pastors serving St. Johns Reformed congregation following Rev. Xander, down the time of their disbanding in 1922, were Rev. John Kessler, Rev. Paul I. Deppen, Rev. M. Samson, Rev. D.B. Shuey, Rev. J. Bachman, Rev. F.S. Fry, and Rev. L.A. Sigrist, the last.

St. Johns Lutheran since its organization, in 1865, has been served by eleven pastors, two from Mulberry and nine from Colburn.

St. Johns Reformed from the same date to disbanding in 1922, by eleven pastors, one from Rossville, one part time from Rossville and part time from Mulberry, and nine from Mulberry.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the 50th. anniversary of the erection of this Church, it is also the 68th. anniversary of the organization of this congregation. To me this church stands as a silent reminder of the-- shall I say chance meeting? or was it not rather the Great Head of the Church that caused the consecrated lone horseman and the humble tiller of the soil to meet and talk over by

the side of the road, the matters that lay nearest their hearts and unconsciously starting the little ball rolling that culminated the erection of this church; that thought came to my mind while writing this sketch and the more I think of it, the more I am convinced of its truth and possibility, for we are told, "God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform." (Thus ends his narrative)

In the year of 1933, the members of the St. John Church, decided to celebrate the 50th. anniversary of the building of the church. A history of its founding was needed and since my father was the oldest, living, responsible member, to him was given the task of gathering all the material he could find to produce a History for future generations.

Since my father always carefully kept all records it was easy for me to give you this and I shall give it just as he had written it for that occasion.

By his daughter
Orpha E. Goslee

My own memory must serve,
1933-43, when disbanded served by Rev. Graham Kleespie,
Rev. B.L. Stroup and Rev. Kohle.
Nothing now remains of the church but the cornerstone,
which my father placed in the cemetery.