

Canada District Founding Congregations

First St. John Lutheran Church, Seebach's Hill

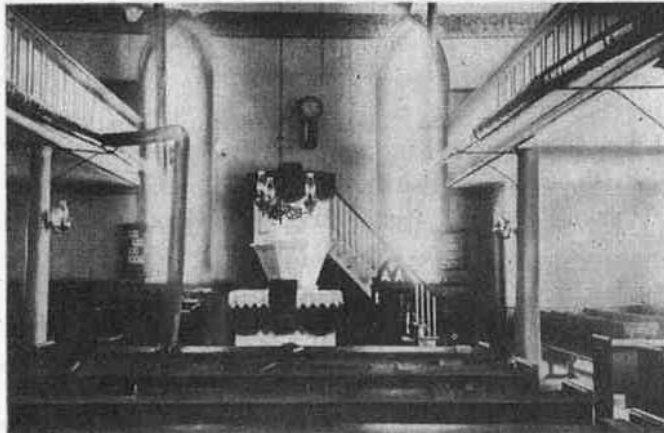
In the year 1829, Andrew Seebach, his wife and seven children ventured into Western Ontario along Huron Road, a rough and dangerous road, in search of land suitable for settlement. He built a homestead on the brow of a hill on this road about eight miles west of Stratford, the location of which became known as Seebach's Hill. Soon other families arrived from Germany and settled along the Huron Road, and, by the year 1835, reading services were regularly being held in various homes. Mr. Seebach donated land for a church and First St. John Lutheran Church was established.

At first travelling preachers ministered to these settlers. The first regular pastor, Rev. Friederich August Horn, was called in 1836 and served in the original log church until 1840. Rev. Theodore Frank followed him, serving from 1841 to 1845.

Rev. August Kelterborn was then called. Even though his family in Germany gave him the best education the times afforded, expecting him to embark on a merchant's career, he decided to go as pastor-missionary to America. He was offered a lucrative position in New York but pressed on to the wilds of western Ontario. The second church was built during Pastor Kelterborn's pastorate. While making a sick call by horseback one wild spring night in 1853, he broke through thin ice and was drenched in cold water and died soon afterwards.

He was succeeded by a person whom the church records call "the luckless Schwalm". He served so poorly that he was compelled to leave within a few months.

The congregation fared little better with the next pastor, Rev. F. W. Tuerck (1853-1857) who soon began to teach false doctrine and was asked to resign.



The interior of St. John's Church, Seebach's Hill, in mid-19th century. Note the pipe from the wood burning stove.

Rev. J. A. Hengerer was called in 1857 and served the congregation well for 14 years until 1871. During his time, the third church, a white frame building, was erected in 1862 at a cost of \$2,500. Its spire, nearly 100 feet tall, was a familiar landmark until the erection of the present church in 1927. Rev. Hengerer founded sister congregations, Second St. John Lutheran Church, Wartburg, in 1858, and First Lutheran Church, Logan Township. He also conducted services in Stratford, although formal organization did not take place until 1877.

Both Rev. Hengerer and his successor, Rev. A. Rehn (1871-1872), were members of the Canada Synod.

In 1872, Rev. H. Succop, the first Missouri Synod pastor, was called. He remained with the congregation until 1875, accepting a call to a congregation in Chicago where he remained until his death. The faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

Pastor Succop was succeeded by Rev. Friederich Dubpernell (1876-1887). A parsonage was built in 1879 which was to be home to pastors and their families for 78 years, until 1957

when it was demolished, due to highway improvements, and a new parsonage built.

He was followed by Rev. W. Weinbach who served 22 years from 1887 to 1909. Rev. C. Gross was pastor from 1909 to 1911, followed by Rev. Arthur Wuggazer (1911-

1919). In 1918 English was introduced where formerly German was the only language used during services.

The next pastor, Rev. Herman William Rueger (1919-1927), introduced English in the Saturday school and the Sunday school. During his pastorate, the preliminary work was done for the building of the present church building. While the building was in progress, Rev. Rueger received a call to Erie, Pennsylvania.

Rev. Frank Malinsky began his pastorate in 1927. During his time, the new church was completed. Services during the building period were held in the church sheds. The church was dedicated November 13, 1927. In 1929, Rev. Malinsky accepted a call to Elmira.

On July 14, 1929, Rev. Albert F. Pollex was installed as pastor. During his pastorate, the Young Peoples' Society flourished and music and singing became a part of every phase of congregational life.

German services were conducted one Sunday a month until early in 1940 when they were discontinued because of the World War II. About the same time, the practice of the women sitting
(Continued on p. 6)

St. John *Continued from p. 5*

on the west side of the church and the men on the east was abandoned.

Until 1947, a Confessional Service, 20 minutes in length, preceded the regular service of Holy Communion, for those who wished to partake of the Lord's Supper. It was also during Rev. Pollex's pastorate that a parish bulletin first made its appearance. Pastor Pollex



A view of the horse sheds at St. John, Seebach's Hill. A large shed still stands, used by cars nowadays.

accepted a call to Trinity Lutheran Church, Toronto in 1949.

Rev. Wilbur P. Lottes served the congregation from December 1949 to February 1958. The work of the Sunday school was stressed and a department added. Rev. Lottes directed and sang with the male choir, and a new organ was purchased in 1956 from Lubeck, Germany, at a cost of \$12,000. During this time also, a dual parish arrangement was made with Second St. John's Lutheran Church, Wartburg.

Rev. Kenneth C. Brill succeeded Rev. Lottes in 1958. Pastor Brill continued to serve the dual parish and held services every second Thursday for patients at the Hillside Rest Home. His health started to decline in January 1960. He died September 14, 1960 and was buried in First St. John's cemetery.

Rev. Thomas C. Pfothner served from 1961 until 1965. He was followed by Rev. Herbert J. Kritsch who served until 1975. In 1966, the congregation joined the Ontario District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Other pastors have been Rev. Robert Morley (1975-1979), Rev. W.

Lawrence Maunula (1980-1982), and Rev. Dennis Bylund (1982-1991).

First St. John's Lutheran Church, Seebach's Hill, consists of 286 communicant members and is served by Rev. William Kramer.