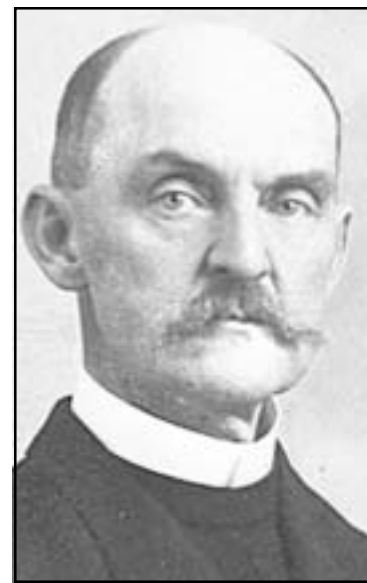


Rev. Jonas Freet, 1894-1899



Rev. J.T. Miller, 1899-1904



Rev. J.B. Grove, 1906-1911



ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH (above) in its early years in Norcatgur, at the site where it stood for over a century. The old church will be rededicated at 5 p.m. Sunday at its new home at the Last Indian Raid Museum in Oberlin during the Mini-Sapa celebration. A replica of the church (below), built by Lee Eckhart for use in parades, is on display at the museum. — Lois Eckhart photos



Memories will fill old Lutheran church for rededication

By MARY LOU OLSON

When St. Mark's Lutheran Church is rededicated at 5 p.m. Sunday during Mini-Sapa Days at the Last Indian Raid Museum, it will bring back memories for Lois Eckhart of Oberlin, whose grandfather John helped get the church organized.

She said it all started when John Eckhart and his wife, the former Caroline Stahl, were looking for a Lutheran pastor to perform the wedding of their daughter, Maggie Eckhart, to Lewis Rinkenberger. They finally found one in McCook, and the Rev. J.W. Kimmel came to Norcatgur to marry the couple on Feb. 21, 1888.

Several months later, on May 20, 1888, the pastor returned to Norcatgur and during that meeting, 17 members were taken into the church. The following month, on June 2, another service was held with five more members added. At this time Mr. Kimmel presented a constitution recommended by the Home Mission Board and C.A. Jom was elected secretary and George Eckhart, treasurer of the new church.

The pastor was directed to confer with the secretary of the Lincoln Land Co. about buying a lot in Norcatgur for a church site, and he reported on June 16, 1888, that he had secured lots 7 and 8, block 7, in Norcatgur for \$50 cash. A building, 28 feet by 40 feet, was to be completed in 12 months.

Charter members listed on June 18, 1888, were John and Carrie Eckhart, John and Rosina Summit, Josie Meyers, C.A. Jom, Nels P. and Annie Wilnerd, Hannah Weimer, Swen Pearson, N.B. Nelson, Anthon and Katie E. Brudewalt, Maggie Rinkenberger, Nels and Martha Jacobson, Mrs. and Mrs. Albert Gustafson, George Eckhart, Benjamin and Emma Hoover, Charles and Susie Hudgel, Lola McKeena, and Mr. and Mrs. Swen Johnson.

The first communion services were held on June 17, and a charter was presented. John Eckhart and Mr. Hoover were elected elders and Mr. Nelson and John Summit as deacons.

The first load of stone for the building arrived at the site on Aug. 10, and work began on the foundation. All work, stone, labor and hauling, was donated by the congregation. The cornerstone was laid on Sept. 8, with a large congregation in attendance. The Methodist and Baptist ministers helped the pastor with the service and the Rev. Pugh preached the sermon.

Lumber for the building was purchased from C.M. Deitz of Omaha at a cost of \$387.20, plus \$98 for freight. The windows came from Chicago at a cost of \$110; furniture, \$115; additional lumber, \$90; hardware, \$41; the bell, \$88, and the organ, \$65. Total money subscribed was \$1,420, of which \$1,302 was received in cash or labor. The building committee included John Eckhart, Mr. Jom and William McKenna.

The church was dedicated in November, but no record is available as to who preached at the service, Miss Eckhart said.



LOIS ECKHART, age 6.

The Rev. Jonas Freet took charge of the mission on Oct. 1, 1894, and he served five years. A parsonage was completed during his pastorate at a cost of \$604 and was just sold a few years ago.

Among pastors who followed were: J.T. Miller, 1899-1904, and a Rev. Rinker, 1905-1906. The Rev. A.L. Groseclose served the church from 1918-1927, and it was during that time that Miss Eckhart was confirmed. His yearly salary was \$700, and during the summer months he helped with the wheat harvest to make ends meet.

Miss Eckhart said she remembers she could take something old and make it over into something that looked like new. One Sunday, the women in the church were quite jealous because they thought the pastor's wife had a new hat. However, it turned out that she had put a new ribbon and a beautiful flower on the old one.

"The couple worked well together in those days when it was 'make it do, or do without.'" she said.

After Mr. Groseclose resigned in 1927, the church was without a pastor and a Rev. Young of Stamford, Neb., filled the pulpit as supply pastor.

A special meeting was called on March 13, 1933, and the congregation voted to call the Rev. R.R. Pfeiffer of Holyoke, Colo. He preached his first sermon on April 9, 1933.

During the Dust Bowl days, Miss Eckhart said that the church board asked for help from the Mission Committee of the Synod of Kansas, and got \$290 for the year 1935-1936. From that time, \$300 a year was received each year with the congregation matching that amount.

She said that the church held its golden jubilee on May 22, 1938, with Rev. Wheeler as speaker. When the church observed its 80th anniversary on July 21, 1968, Pastor Pfeiffer returned to speak.

Although Miss Eckhart moved to Oberlin and became active in the

United Methodist Church, she said she still has many fond memories of services at Norcatgur, where she was pianist for many years.

"We lived 3 1/2 miles southwest of Norcatgur," she recalled, "so our folks took us to church in the lumber wagon or buggy and I even walked sometimes when they couldn't go."

She said that it was her brother, Lee Eckhart, and Bill Nelson, members of the church board, who made arrangements with church authorities to move the church to the museum grounds.

Bee Nelson, who still lives at Norcatgur, and her late husband Bill were active members of St. Mark's. She said their children, Todd and Tara Nelson, were baptized and confirmed in this church. Both began playing for church services and Sunday School after Fern Hilsinger's health failed.

"Though the church stood in the same location over 100 years, it never had running water or restrooms," Mrs. Nelson said. "If those things were needed, everyone just went over to the parsonage next door."

She added that among special memories for her were the wiener roasts that Lee Eckhart held using the pot-bellied stove in his garage.

She said that in 1984, they still had Sunday School, but no church services after Pastor Greg Larsen, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Oberlin, left. They did continue with Sunday School until 1985. Other Faith Lutheran pastors who had previously served the congregation were J.O. Baumgartner and Larry Arganbright.

The Nelsons served and worked as a family in cleaning, mowing, teaching classes and furnishing music over the years. The church worked with the Norcatgur United Methodist Church for summer Bible School, with the junior high age at the Lutheran church.

Memories of the church are many for Bonnie Rapp, who now lives in Manhattan with her husband, Bob.

"I will always remember Uncle Lloyd Brooks," she said. "I think I thought he was God. He didn't accept grape juice for communion. It had to be Mogan David wine!"

"Fern Hilsinger was a dear friend and a pillar of St. Mark's. Our daughter, Robin, wrote a Christmas story play that was presented on Christmas Eve around 1967. I also remember when Lee Eckhart and I hung Christmas lights in the belfry one year."

"One Christmas Eve service, when we came out of the church, it was snowing, with the flakes as big as silver dollars. Our family walked home, four blocks, singing Christmas carols. A most memorable Christmas!"

"Our family also helped with various jobs at St. Mark's: teaching Sunday School, music, janitor, mowing, and snow removal. I have many pleasant memories of St. Mark's."

Among those who attended the church during the last years were Lloyd Brooks, Mrs. Hilsinger, Harwood "Hop" and Peggy Lockhart, Lucy Koch, the Nelsons, Mrs. Rapp, Mrs. Eckhart and Marie McChesney.