

*'In the beginning God...'*

Genesis, chapter 1



THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL (above left), the old frame St. John's Lutheran Church and parsonage are shown at the time of their dedication on Aug. 29, 1926. They were eight miles northwest of Oberlin in Logan Township. The present church (below) was built at 510 N. Marks for \$122,000 after the congregation decided in 1954 to relocate to Oberlin.

# Churchgoers recall stories of yesteryear

By MARY LOU OLSON

Memories flooded the minds of St. John's Lutheran Church members Sunday as they marked the 120th anniversary of the church, which started in western Decatur County between Herndon and Traer.

Six grandchildren of charter members Henry May and Henry C. Euhus are still active members and shared some of their memories. Other charter members included Paul Meyer, Henry Thaete, John Rieppel, Henry Stier and Ernest Leyrer.

"I was baptized confirmed and married in St. John's," said Martin May, "and I hope to have my funeral also in St. John's."

"Pastor F.A. Wegener, who confirmed me, made a lasting impression on me by insisting we memorize many Bible passages and hymns, many of which I can still recall even to this day."

"A very important part of my life has always been my fellow believers and members of St. John's Lutheran Church," said Karolyn (May) Muirhead. "My first connection with the church was a white frame building near Herndon, where I was baptized. That church was sold and moved, but the cemetery remains where my grandparents and other relatives were buried."

"This congregation joined fellowship with the Lutheran church near Traer and a frame building was built 8 miles west of Oberlin, along with a school. Pastor Wegener taught catechism for an hour every morning, no excuses accepted for not learning the memory work assigned. On Jan. 1, 1931, this church was destroyed by fire."

"During World War II, many young men in our church served their country and Pastor E. C. Schmidt wrote a newsletter once a month which I typed, then made carbon copies to send to each one. This was the church where my brother Hubert was ordained into the ministry, the very first one since the congregation was organized, and there is still a cemetery there."

"There were two wonderful ladies, Louise Helmkamp and Elsa Unger, who played the various organs, beginning with the old pump organ with pedals for power, and they also directed the choir."

"After the church and school relocated to Oberlin in 1955, James Sahl and Dorothy Moore were teachers. Later the school was rebuilt with the educational building. Although in various places and buildings, it has always been God's House, where His word is taught."

Arthur May recalled, "My earliest memories begin as a small child when we attended the old church north of the Ed Helmkamp farm. When I was 6, a new church was built on land donated by Albert and Marie Lueke in Logan Township, west of Oberlin, and we

## Church celebrates 120 years

The organization of St. John's Lutheran Church, which marked its 120th anniversary Sunday, actually dates back to the 1880s.

Immigration of German and Austrian Lutherans, as well as settlers from eastern states to western Kansas, was at its height.

In 1879, the Rev. C. Meyer of Kankakee, Ill., was sent out as missionary-at-large by the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, to work the territory of northwest Kansas and southwest Nebraska.

He and his wife and family settled on a homestead two miles east of Herndon.

First services were conducted in a sod church a half mile northeast of his home.

During these first few years, this small group of Christians started a parochial school. After the sod church, services were held in the District 39 school house and in homes of members.

Henry Thaete, one of the charter members (See CHURCH on Page 10B)

attended services there.

"As a young boy, we spoke low German in our home, and I could not understand the church services since they were in the high German dialect. Soon after I went to school, church services began to alternate in German and English and we later worshipped completely in English."

"Since we didn't live far from the church, I remember seeing the smoke as the frame church burned down. I was only 12 at the time. I began first grade at the Mount Pleasant School and my teacher was Vina (Gragg) Berndt."

"Since we only spoke German at home, she spent many hours teaching me English. I will always remember that she asked my parents to begin speaking English at home so it would be easier for the children when they went to school. Without her time and patience, I would not have done as well as I did in school."

"When I was in third grade, I began attending the newly built St. John's Lutheran Parochial School, completed eighth grade there in 1931 and was confirmed the same



THIS BRICK CHURCH served the congregation of St. John's Lutheran Church for many years. It was built after the frame church was destroyed by fire on Jan. 1, 1931.

year. Another teacher who had great influence on my grade school years at the parochial school was Alvina (Fuhr) Unger. Later she and her husband Tony became neighbors and she is still a friend of the family today."

"As a young person, St. John's was the spiritual, educational and social center of our lives," said Shirley (Euhus) Shields. "The church included most of my extended family. Nearly everyone I knew was there."

"We had our day school, which was always good size, around 18 to 20., and I didn't lack for classmates, as I started in a class of five girls. We gained four boys by eighth grade."

"We had many good times with school and Christmas programs and birthday parties. Our school was the first Lutheran Day School to be accredited in the state."

Walter May said, "I was baptized in the Herndon Lutheran Church. Of course, I don't remember that, but we lived just three miles south of the church."

"I remember occasional German services. We kids would sit through the service

and we didn't understand all the words, but we did understand about half of it."

"On a warm summer day in 1931, Wilbur, Lois and I were playing in the yard when a car drove in with Pastor Wegener and some other men in it."

"They and my father had been working on the construction of the new brick church. They told my mother that some scaffolding had collapsed and that my father had been hurt. He was unable to work for some time, so during harvest he had to hire custom cutters. Because prices for wheat were so low then, it took half of the entire wheat crop to pay the custom cutter."

"I also remember Miss Alvina Fuhr, who was my teacher in first and second grades in parochial school. She was a very good teacher for all eight grades — about 15 or 17 kids. She married Tony Unger after my second-grade year."

Stuart Euhus said, "I went to school at our parochial school out in the country for eight grades, from the fall of 1935 to 1943. Our school always had a picnic at the end of the eight months of school."

"One thing I shall always remember is that after we moved the church to town in 1955, I was on a landscape committee and we decided to put native grass sod on all of the first hillside and south of the church. We had rigged up a knife to cut it with and mounted it on a tractor. We picked up the sod pieces and put them in a pickup truck and hauled them into town. All went well and all of the grass grew."

"Another project was when we learned that a nursery dealer in Great Bend had pine trees to give away. They were all 6 to 10 feet tall. They dug them and we hauled them to Oberlin and planted them and they all lived. They are now 30 to 55 feet tall. All of the cedar trees on the north side of the property were dug out at the old site and moved into town also."

"We used to have Mission Festival Sundays in the morning and again at 2 p.m. with a large potluck dinner. People from neighboring congregations were invited to come and a lot of young people, high school age and up, came for an evening of socializing, getting acquainted, games and more food."