

THE OBERLIN HERALD OH!

The feature page about interesting people, places and things to do



THE MODERN BUILDING (above) of the Herndon Covenant Church shows the addition of the former Laing School building, which was added in 1987, along with a new entrance. The church also has an elevator. The church (below left) was expanded

with an addition, which included a new platform, classrooms, rest rooms and kitchen in the early 1950's. Later, the new entrance was added.



IMMIGRANT SWEDISH families (above) built the first sod church in 1889 just west of the present location of the Herndon Covenant Cemetery, along present Highway 36. The original frame church (below) shows its first addition in 1926 with the new entrance.



Herndon Covenant Church plans to celebrate 125 years

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It was 125 years ago in the fall of 1887 when 18 Christian friends met at the home of Mr. and Mrs. O. A. Sandberg southwest of Herndon for the purpose of organizing a church.

The congregation and former members and friends of the Herndon Covenant Church will celebrate that milestone on Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 20 and Oct. 21, at the church.

The weekend will begin with a Swedish smorgsbord, prepared by Covenant Women Ministries, on Saturday evening for the congregation and invited guests. A celebration will be held during morning worship services at 10 a.m. on Sunday, followed by a catered dinner. Keith Reuther is pastor of the church.

CHURCH HISTORY

As the congregation of the Herndon Covenant Church looks back over the past 125 years to the days when Swedish immigrants settled in this community, it is with deep thankfulness to God, who tenderly cared for them during the hardships of living first in meager dugouts and later when they broke the sod itself with primitive tools to make homes for their families, according to a book printed during the 100th anniversary.

Small sod houses could be seen here and there on these vast grass-covered prairies with narrow wagon trails leading to each home.

First settlers in this community in Rawlins County were Scandinavians who had heeded the call to "Go West" in search of homesteads. Many came to this new land to worship God and begin a new life for their families.

From the beginning, several Swedish families who loved the Lord met in their humble homes for worship services. The attendance increased until it became apparent that they would need a larger place to meet.

Others who met in the Sandberg home and also became charter members were Emma and Olaf Erikson, Axel (Harry) Larson, Victor Larson, Mr. and Mrs. August Hedin, Mr. and Mrs. John Monson, Mr. and Mrs. Charley Ericson, Amanda Clintberg, Leonard Holmdahl, Hedda Gustafson, Mrs. Sophia Lundberg, Daniel Forsgren, and Mons Johnson. The group chose the name "Bethlehem Mission Church."

The group continued to meet in their homes for Sunday services and prayer meetings for two more years. The settlers opened their homes to visiting pastors during this time, sharing cheerfully what the Lord



Pastor Keith Reuther

had provided for them.

In 1889, it was decided to build a sod church. It was located west of the present Herndon Covenant Cemetery and the address was Thornton, a post office that was later abandoned. So many came to help that it was nearly completed in one day. Olaf Erikson and Harry Larson drove to the Driftwood Creek north of Herndon to cut a tall tree to be used as a ridge pole and upon their return they found the walls erected, so the pole was put in place. The roof was finished with a layer of willow branches and covered with sod.

The interior had a ceiling but they could not afford a floor until the next year. Pews and the pulpit were made by church members. The only music available was from several guitars, which added much to the services.

A.M. Hoaglund was first chairman of the church, O. W. Erikson, first secretary and L.V. Larson, the first treasurer. All served from 1890-1897.

The financial support of the church was quite a problem for the early settlers, so in order to meet the obligations, members planted three acres of corn each year which was sold and the money given to the general fund. At times the three acres produced as much as \$20 for the treasury. Total income recorded in the treasurer's book the first year was \$1.97 and expenses were \$1.83.

In 1901, a new frame structure was erected at the present location, two miles south and one-half mile west of the original site, in Laing Township, at a cost of \$568.20. Pews were purchased for \$139.26 and a pulpit was built by Nils Nelson at a cost of \$35. The clock, still in use in the church sanctuary, was given by A.M. Hoaglund and an organ was purchased in 1903 for \$45.

Mons Johnson faithfully served

as lay pastor and janitor, humbly bringing a message from God's Word without thought of remuneration.

First pastor of the church was Rev. Almlad, who served in 1903-04. He became the first link of the church with the foreign mission field when he left to serve in Mongolia.

The Ladies Aid Society was organized in 1905 with Mission Church (Bethlehem) Sewing Society chosen as the official name. Officers elected were: Mrs. J. A. Erikson, chairman; Miss Betty Sandberg, secretary; and Miss Eva Hoaglund, treasurer.

Other charter members were Mrs. A.M. Hoaglund, Mrs. L. Holmdahl, Mrs. E. Holmdahl, Mrs. O. W. Erikson, Mrs. O. A. Sandberg, Miss Amy Hoaglund, and Miss Cecelia Sandburg.

The women served dinner at several farm sales in the 1930s, and voted to serve lunch at the Oberlin Sale Pavilion every two weeks at the Nov. 19, 1935, meeting. The group officially joined Covenant's Women's Auxiliary in September 1952 and it is now known as Covenant Women Ministries.

Other pastors who have served the church include: Knute Carlson, Fred Eastburg, Adolph Grandin, C.O.L. Nelson, Rev. Abraham, Rev. Veery, August Peterson, Sheldon Anderson, Rev. Swenson, Rodney North, W. Carpenter, Henry Hoffman, Hjalmer Swanson, Fred Granstrom, Loren Carlson, Walter Nelson, Eugene Layne, Tom Garretson, Noel Cisneros and the present pastor, Keith Reuther.

Among other missionaries who have served overseas or as home missionaries include: Matilda Erikson, Elna Larson, Gordon and Geneva (Noren) Christensen, Evelyn Noren, Edwin and Ruth Noren, Kathryn Carlson, Bob and Beverly (Bryan) Fleenor, Dale and Maryanne (Benda) Bishop, Paul and Janice (Noren) Quackenbush, Paul and Sheryl Noren, Dennis and Mary Lynn (Christensen) Carlson, John and Jan Mai, and Mike and Tracy (Green) Harmon.

The original frame structure still serves the congregation, but several additions have been added, including the former Laing school building, which now serves as the sanctuary.

Present officers include; Chris Schmidt, chairman; Clay Anderson, vice chairman; Rosalie Capo, secretary, and Gayle Carlson, treasurer. Cindi Grafel is chairman of Covenant Women Ministries.