

History of Emanuel Lutheran Church -- Tawas City, Michigan

by Tim Honke

Senior Church History

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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11531 W. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Walter Kasischke for the time and effort he spent in collecting the information covering the history of the first 100 years of our congregation. In 1980 the historical information published in his centennial booklet was furnished to the Iosco Historical Society for inclusion in the County records. I wish also to express my appreciation to Mr. Arnold Hosbach for his coverage of the history of the last 15 years of our congregation. This information was gleaned mostly from minutes of the Church Council and Congregational voters meetings.

The first white arrivals to the Tawas Area were gold prospectors who discovered instead a wealth of white pine as well as excellent fishing. Subsequent settlers came from southern Michigan, the eastern states, and Canada, with a sizeable representation from Europe also included. Lumbering and fishing were the main occupations. Farming soon followed as an additional major operation. After establishing their homes, the settlers lost little time in building houses of worship, with a variety of religious denominations soon represented in the area.

In the early days, Lutheran missionaries from southern Michigan visited the area to give spiritual aid to the German immigrants who had settled here. On August 5, 1877, Emanuel congregation was formed at East Tawas, Michigan, with Pastor William Reuther of Bethel congregation, Bay City, Michigan, assisting in the organization. To provide a historical context, Tawas City was founded in 1854; Iosco County, 1857; and East Tawas, 1862.

The names of persons who attended the organizational meeting are not known, but some of the names on early church records are: William Boldt, August Brandt, August Dettmer, William Draeger, Fred Gaul, Gustave Gaul, Christian Goedecke, August Kobs, John Kobs, William Kohn, Treasurer Ernest Scholz and Secretary Karl Brinkman. Others include Karl Brandt, F. Reinke, August Luedtke, Sr., August Cholcher, G. Koenig, Ernst Schoenbeck, August Kohn, Emil Buch, Sr., Richard Herman, Albert and Karl Timreck.

Services were held once a month from April to October, and every other month during the winter. These services alternated

among members' homes in the Tawases. When the pastor was not present, sermons were read by the deacons. Yearly dues were \$5.00 per communicant.

In 1878 a request was forwarded to Rev. S. Elingman at Ann Arbor asking that Pastor John Haas serve the mission. The request was approved and Pastor Haas served the congregation until 1882. On September 3, 1882, Rev. William Asall was called as the first permanent pastor of the congregation.

The following pastors have served Emanuel:

William Reuther	1877-1878
John Haas	1879-1882
William Asall	1882-1885
Karl Mueller	1885-1886
William Asall	1887-1897
John Karrer	1897-1900
Albert Emmel	1901-1906
Carl C. Henning	1907-1918
August Kehrberg	1918-1928
Otto J. Eckert	1928-1930
Walter C. Voss	1930-1936
John J. Roekle	1936-1951
Paul Heyn	1951-1954
Leonard Newmann	1954-1962
James F. Rockhoff	1964-

During a period of approximately twenty-two months between 1962 and 1964 Pastor J. Ruege of Lincoln served the congregation as vacancy pastor. Considerable assistance was also supplied during this time by staff members from Michigan Lutheran Seminary of Saginaw, as well as Vicar Reinhardt Kom.

Emanuel's founding fathers were of German descent and thus all church services, as well as meetings, were conducted in that language. The first sermon in English was delivered by Rev. East of Bay City on the occasion of the 1901 Mission Festival. One English service per month was held beginning in 1918. From 1928

to 1951 two services were held each Sunday, one in English and one in German. The first congregational meeting in the English language was conducted on January 16, 1938. The last regular German service was held here on September 23, 1951 with Rev. G. Schmelzer of Hale, Michigan, as the guest speaker.

In the early years Emanuel was affiliated with the now defunct Michigan Synod. Membership in "Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States" became effective in 1892. The constitution, originally written in German in 1891, was revised and rewritten in English in 1951. At the beginning of 1992, Emanuel congregation numbered 94 voting members, 448 communicant members, and 566 souls.

In 1881 the membership purchased a house and remodeled it as a location for church services. It was also used as a temporary residence for the mission pastor. Plans for a church building in Tawas City were approved in 1881 and construction was begun in 1882. Cost of the structure, including cabinet work on the altar and pulpit and painting of the entire church, was \$1,194.00. The congregation found it necessary to borrow \$600 to finance the project. There were 29 voting members at the time.

A bell was purchased in 1885; song books were obtained for guests, and a ladder was placed on the roof to facilitate fire protection efforts. It was resolved to ring the bell three times, at half-hour intervals, before church services. This ringing of the bell was in accordance with an old German custom.

New pews and two stoves were installed in 1890, and a beaded ceiling replaced the plain wooden boards. In 1908 the Ladies Aid donated the first electric lights installed in the church. A reed

organ was a gift from Salem Congregation, Scio Township, Ann Arbor, Michigan. This was replaced with a pipe organ in 1919. Also in 1919, an addition was built to the church including the chancel, sacristy and a storage room. The stained glass windows, which had been donated by members, were dedicated in 1929. A window represented a substantial contribution even at that time, approximately \$85.00. A new bell was purchased in 1932, a move necessitated when the old bell cracked. A bolt of lightning demolished the church steeple in 1941. Fortunately, no other major damage occurred, and the steeple was rebuilt. In 1947 the chancel was reduced in size, the walls and ceiling of the church were covered with tile board, and an oil furnace was installed. A Connsonata electric organ was purchased in 1948 to replace the pipe organ, and a Vibrachime carillon, donated by a member in 1952, provided an extra feature by permitting use of the chime effect in connection with the organ music.

Ensuing years brought about a variety of changes in the church interior, including: hanging ceiling lights, tiled floors, and replacement of the Connsonata organ with an Allen in 1970. More recent changes include a gas furnace, carpeting in 1971, new pews in 1971, and a sound amplification system in 1975.

Second Street frontage, faced by the church and parsonage was surfaced with blacktop in 1976 to facilitate parking. In 1977 the congregation had Lexon protective glass installed to shield the beautiful and virtually irreplaceable stained glass windows from vandalism. In 1980 the historical information published in our centennial booklet was furnished to the Iosco Historical Society

for inclusion in the County records.

In 1984 serious discussions began concerning the construction of a new church and membership input was solicited in 1985. The architectural firm of Wigen, Tinknel and Myer of Bay City, Michigan was chosen as the project architect in 1986.

Ground breaking services for the selected site, just west of and adjoining the school, were held November 1, 1987 on the 110th Anniversary of the congregation, with final plans for the construction of the new church completed on January 26, 1988. Construction proceeded rapidly and on January 28, 1990 the first service was held in the new church.

In order to provide Christian training for children a parochial school was erected in 1883 with the pastor, Rev. Asall, in charge of instruction. The first school building was situated a short distance from the rear of the church. Although not an elaborate structure, it did serve the intended purpose for a period of ten years.

In the early years the pastor was also the teacher, however an additional teacher was soon required and a woman teacher joined the pastor. With requirements for additional subjects, and in increasing enrollments, a male teacher was also called. In order to facilitate teaching and learning, a wall chart for reading and wall maps of the United States and North America were purchased in 1885.

Plans for a new school building were adopted in 1892 and construction was completed in 1893. The lumber used was cut locally in the Prescott Mill. The school was constructed at the northeast

corner of Fifth Avenue and Second Street in Tawas City.

The first English textbooks were introduced in 1896, all previous instruction had been conducted in German. Benches were also purchased that year. At this time the School Board resolved that the school would be in session for 160 days a year.

Additional desks were purchased for the school by the Young People's Society and Ladies Aid in 1906. That year a number of German and English subjects were added to the curriculum. The school was not graded at the time, the reader system being used.

An addition to the school was built in 1940 to house bathroom facilities. An oil furnace donated by the Ladies Aid in 1951, new hardwood floors, and tile ceilings were subsequent improvements to modernize the building.

For many years enrollees included numerous students from Zion's congregation. In 1949 Mr. R. Korthals was a part-time teacher and in 1950 Miss caroline Witte served on a full time teaching basis. In 1959 Emanuel constructed its present school building, located on North Street in Tawas City, at a cost of \$63,000.00. Emanuel and Zion operated an amalgamated school system for a number of years, however in 1962 the two congregations decided to function separately. The old school building was razed and the grounds were converted into a parking area for church attendees. A remodeling project in 1974 provided improved classroom arrangements, an office, reception room and storage facilities.

Enrollment in 1978 was down to 35 students and there was talk of going to a one teacher system. However, this was not initiated in the hope that enrollment would increase. Presently, we have a

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total enrollment of 57 students. The inclusion of a kindergarten class was undertaken in 1982 and proved to be an asset to the system. The use of a paid teacher's aide was also introduced at this time. In 1986, enrollment had increased to the point of once again necessitating the addition of a third teacher to the system.

In the late 70's and early 80's the school's semi-flat roof presented a serious problem however only minor repairs were made. A continuing worsening of this problem was a prime factor in having a duo-pitched roof installed in conjunction with the building of the new church. 1983 marked the 100th consecutive year that Emanuel Lutheran congregation has provided a Christian education for its young people. The present school staff consists of Mr. Dennis Friske as principal, Mrs. Elaine Howell as Kindergarten and lower grade teacher, and Mr. Todd Palmer as middle grade teacher.

In 1898 a home for a parsonage was purchased at AuSable. It was dismantled and rebuilt on church property in Tawas City. On July 5, 1903, fire broke out in the horse sheds near the rear of the parsonage. The fire spread to the barn where Pastor Emmel kept his horse and buggy. The parsonage also caught fire and burned to the ground. The congregation immediately proceeded to build a new parsonage at a cost of \$1,825.00. A bathroom was installed when water and sewer facilities became available in 1937. Remodeling of the kitchen took place in 1951, as well as other improvements including: covering the floors of several rooms with tile, installation of an oil furnace, and construction of a new chimney. In 1974, it became necessary to make further improvements, including modernizing of the kitchen and bathroom. Exten-

sive refurbishing of paneling, wall papering, carpeting, and other improvements took place in 1976.

Rebuilding of the horse sheds took place after the destructive fire. In the 1920's the sheds were dismantled and a combination garage and utility building constructed. Situated directly behind the parsonage, this structure was extensively remodeled in the 1980's.

The present teacherage is the fourth purchased by the congregation. It is located on North Street three blocks west of the school. It was purchased in 1966 as a new home for the sum of \$15,500.00. Previous residences for teachers were located on Second Street, Fifth Avenue, and Sixth Avenue, all within a distance of slightly over a block from the schoolhouse that was then in use.

The Ladies Aid has assisted in numerous worthy projects since the time of its founding. Records indicate that the ladies renovated the first parsonage to permit the holding of church services there. The ladies have also assumed responsibility for periodic cleaning of the church and school. The supervising and serving of meals for various church functions have also been ably carried out by this organization. The Ladies Aid has often been consulted when repairs and alterations were contemplated for church property. Presently, there is an active group of 25 members, although many additional ladies regularly participate in various organization-sponsored activities.

The choir has enhanced church services through the singing of hymns and other sacred music since the founding of the church.

Membership fluctuated over the years as illustrated by the following: Male chorus of 13 under direction of Pastor Asall in 1890, mixed choir of 12 under teacher Theodore Pelzl in 1920, mixed choir of 24 in the 1930's under the direction of teacher William Woltmann, mixed choir of 25 under teacher Wilbert Mueller in the 1950's. The present mixed choir consists of 15 members under the direction of Dennis Friske, school principal.

Choir renditions have added greatly to the beauty of church services as well as to a variety of special functions. Christmas service performed jointly with students from the day school have been especially noteworthy events.

Sunday School activities are conducted in four age groups -- beginner, primary, intermediate and upper. Attendance is open to all members of the congregation between the ages of 4 and 14. Continuing efforts are being made with a view toward increased enrollment. To this end, an active Youth Group, under the direction of Mr. Todd Palmer, has been organized for 13-18 year old members of the congregation.

The congregation's cemetery is situated at the west Tawas City limits. The property was acquired in 1888 from Mr. and Mrs. Lyman Smith for \$76.00.

Congregation efforts and excellent, individual, volunteer help have resulted in commendable maintenance of the grounds over the years. An attractive flower garden arrangement with statue is situated near the cemetery entrance and lends itself nicely to a well-kept area.

In 1976 an opportunity was offered by the city of Tawas City

to purchase approximately 3 1/4 acres of land adjoining the cemetery on the north and west for the sum of \$2,430.00. The congregation decided to purchase the property, thus roughly doubling the cemetery size.

in 1978 the congregation purchased 2.5 acres at the cemetery from Tawas City for a nominal sum. The present charge for a cemetery lot is \$100.00.

The Lord has permitted tremendous progress during the past 115 years. Many present Emanuel members can vividly recall the horse and buggy day changes since the early model automobiles, and advances made in air travel. More recent transportation developments have centered on spaceship travel, including man's landing on the moon. Science and invention have had a great influence in providing remarkable improvements in the every-day way of life over the years. May the Grace of the Lord remain and His people continue to enjoy these truly rich blessings.

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