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THE SAXONS IN EAST-CENTRAL WISCONSIN

by

Dale Klessig 1982

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## PREFACE

It was in November of 1838 that five sailing vessels, bearing about 700 Saxons Lutherans under the leadership of Pastor Martin Stephan left Bremerhaven, Germany bound for America. By year's end four ships arrived safely in New Orleans but the Amalia was lost at sea. Saddened but not willing to give up they moved on to St. Louis and Perry County, Missouri. By 1844 Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Louis was formed and the Rev. Carl F.W. Walther was pastor.

To students of Lutheranism in America, the above story is a familiar one. It is these people from Saxony who would later be the backbone of the Missouri Synod. They were not, however, the only Saxons to settle in the United States. Right here in Wisconsin large numbers of Saxons made their homes. Their story is not that well known, and much can be researched to uncover and clarify this portion of Lutheranism in America. The following is an attempt to begin this task. It is by no means complete. The Title: "THE SAXONS IN EAST-CENTRAL WISCONSIN" was chosen because of the large number of Saxons who came to this region. This certainly was not the only region of the state where the Saxons had settled.

## THE GERMANS WHO CAME TO WISCONSIN

Why did so many Germans come to live in Wisconsin? The answer to this question is varied and complex. The major reasons seem to be two fold: 1) the climate of Wisconsin was very similar to that of Germany, 2) Wisconsin officially became a state in 1848, at a time when many Germans were seeking a new place in which to live. The land was cheap and readily available.

To better understand why so many Germans came to East-Central Wisconsin consider the following:

### 1800-1820

Emigration out of Germany during this time period was very slight. After 1800 it was caused mostly by economic and political reasons and was not from any one particular area of Germany. It was due to a large extent to the reform movements in the various areas of the world. The American Revolution in the 1770's, the French Revolution in the 1790's, and the overthrow of the Holy Roman German Empire in 1806, all created the feeling that changes would shortly come to Germany as well.

### 1820-1830

An increase in emigration from certain areas in Germany began at this time due to the Napoleonic wars. The area of Württemberg was one of the hardest hit during this time. Of those who emigrated at this time a large portion of them came from this area.

### 1830-1840

Overproduction, overpopulation, unavailability of land, and the fact that mass-production had replaced the artisan worker caused many to decide to emigrate.

In America at this time it was a period of prosperity. The Jacksonian Democracy provided what many Germans had been striving for in vain.

Many of the Germans leaving at this time were from the Rhein area of Germany; and they settled extensively in the areas of Ohio, Indiana, and Missouri.

### 1840-1860

During this time period there were many reasons that caused people to emigrate. The following are some of the reasons:

-- crop failures in the late 1840's and early 1850's caused food prices to rise.

-- continued increases in mass production and the use of machine products caused unemployment to increase.

-- political changes that were expected to come about did not materialize.

-- The government itself actually began encouraging emigration.

-- Cheaper and more convenient means of transportation came with the expansion of the railway system throughout Germany.

All of these things resulted in an increase of Germans leaving their country. The immigration of Germans surpassed all the other nationalities in America. With Western territories and new states like Wisconsin opening up, immigration into America was very much encouraged.

The beginnings of most of the German settlements in East-Central Wisconsin were started during this period. The settlement of German emigrants in Wisconsin began as early as 1839. From that time on to 1845 those who left the fatherland did so primarily to escape persecution for their opposition to the union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches, and to establish communities where their religion would be tolerated.



↑ Manitowoc County

Sheboygan County  
↓

● location of churches

- 1- Newtonburg - St. John's
- 2- Centerville - St. John
- 3- Centerville - St. Peter
- 4- ● St. John - St. Peter today
- 5- St. Peter's - Mosel Today - Grace
- 6- Immanuel - no longer exist
- 7- St. Paul's - M. Hersville
- 8- Sheboygan - Trinity

City of Sheboygan

The North Germans began the movement. In 1839 about a thousand of them, coming chiefly from Pomerania, departed for America and settled almost wholly in Milwaukee and Ozaukee counties. Cedarburg and Freistadt were founded by them. Between 1850 and 1860 a large number of the settlers of these villages sold out and moved to Sheboygan and Manitowoc Counties. In 1843 another emigration was made from Brandenburg and Pomerania. This was the last great emigration from those parts for some time, for by 1845 the religious strife had abated to some extent. Germans from other provinces of North Germany, however, continued arriving in great streams.

In 1847 a group of several families from Hameln settled in Town Herman in Sheboygan County, and about a hundred families from Lippe Detmold took up lands in various parts of Sheboygan and Manitowoc Counties. They were for the most part members of the German Evangelical Reformed Church. Others from this same region continued to come for the next five years.

Meanwhile emigrants from Rhenish Prussia, chiefly from the districts of Cologne and Treves, were settling in small groups along the lake shore. In Sheboygan County they were among the early settlers, coming in 1846. In 1847 economic conditions in the upper valley of the Rhine were very bad and 300 inhabitants of Elberfeld and Barmen, chiefly handcraftmen and tradesmen of some means, went to America. A large number of them settled in Sheboygan.

The Saxons settled in Wisconsin as early as 1839, when seven families purchased a half section of Mequon. After they were prospering, they induced large numbers of their fellow countrymen to join them. In this way the present town of Mosel in Sheboygan

County, and Town of Centerville in Manitowoc County was settled.

After 1854 the immigration of Germans to Wisconsin was checked to some extent. Some came almost each year, but another high water mark was not reached until about 1880.

#### 1860-1865

Due to the Civil War in America, German immigration took a sharp decline. Many of the German immigrants who came into America just prior to this either enlisted or were drafted, and

#### 1866-1900

Between 1866 and 1900 emigration out of Germany and into the United States fluctuated continually. The Prussian Wars from 1866 to 1870 caused an increase in emigration which corresponded with the beginning of Homesteading in the United States. In 1882 a record number of German immigrants was attained with the arrival of 250,630 immigrants. In 1900 emigration out of Germany began to decline.

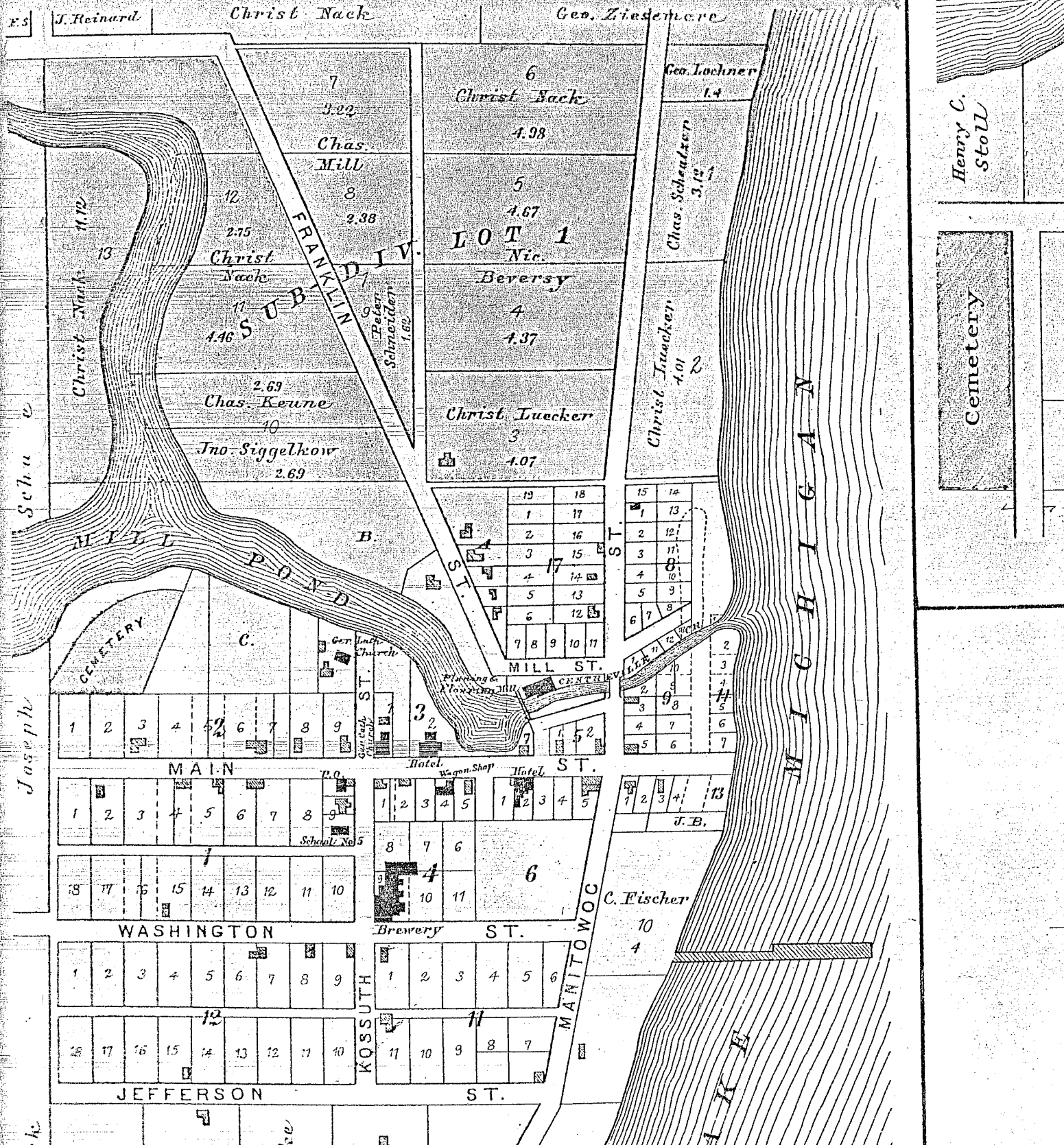
# CENTREVILLE

HICA P.O.

MANITOWOC CO. WIS

Scale 400 ft. to an Inch

D.B.



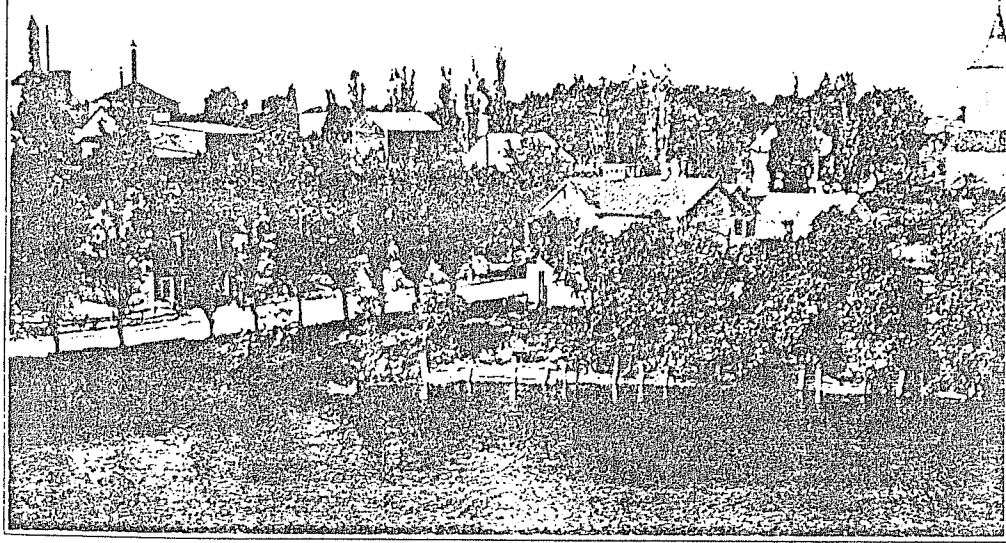


## THE EARLY MISSION WORK AMONG THE SAXONS

In order to better understand the work that the early missionaries faced, it is helpful first to know a little bit about the people who settled in East-Central Wisconsin. We will be primarily focussing in on the townships of Mosel and Centerville in Sheboygan and Manitowoc Counties respectively.

The Township of Mosel is located in the Northeastern corner of Sheboygan county along Lake Michigan. It was a part of the Town of Sheboygan until 1853 when a separate township organization was authorized by the county board. The New Township was named Mosel after the Moselle River in Germany from which the earliest settlers of this township had come. The first settlers had come in 1847. There is no city or major village in the entire township even to this day. The township is primarily agricultural, but when the Lake Shore and Western Railroad was built a small settlement was built up around the station which was known as Seven Mile Creek. (Located seven miles north of Sheboygan.) Later the name of the community was changed to Haven, the name it still bears today.

The Township of Centerville is located in the Southeastern corner of Manitowoc County. Its name is derived from the fact that it is located half way between Sheboygan and Manitowoc. It is made up largely of Saxons along with Rhenish, Prussian, and Lippe Detmold settlers. The latter are found mainly to the north part of the township. This may account for many of the close ties which still exist today between the people of Southern Centerville and those of Mosel and on to Sheboygan; they all come from the same background. North of Centerville the people seem to have closer ties with Manitowoc.



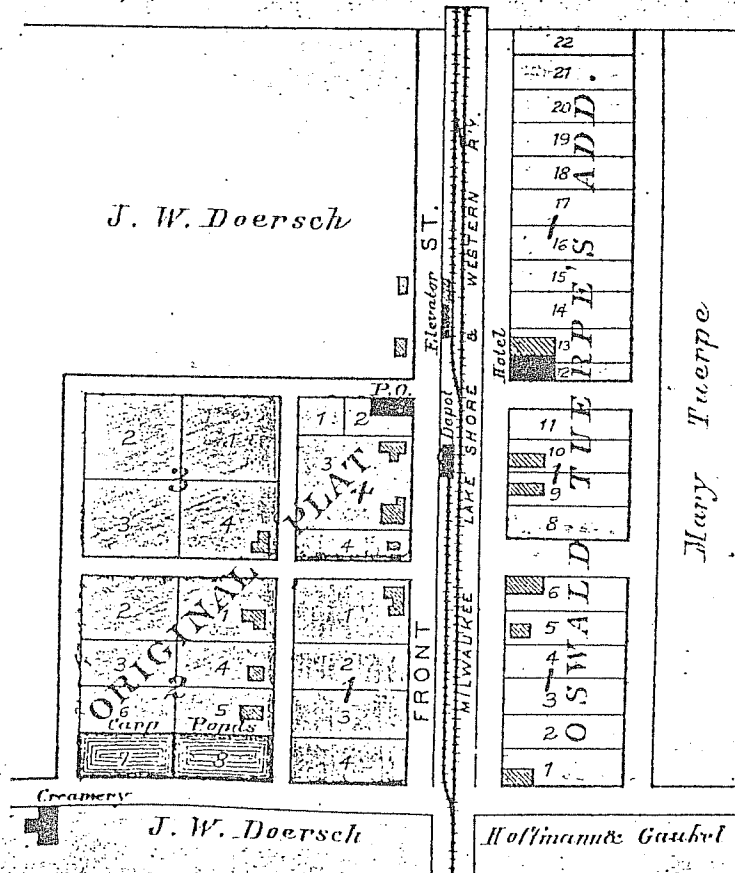
VIEW OF HIKA, NOW CALLED CENTERVILLE

# CLEVELAND

## CENTREVILLE STATION

MANITOWOC CO. WIS.

Scale 20 Rods to one Inch.



The Township was formed in 1850, when the town had a population of 210. Among the earliest settlers was Ferdinand Andreas Klessig, a native of Schlagwitz, Saxony. He was the great, great grandfather of this writer. He emigrated to America in 1848, settling first in Washington County and then moving to Manitowoc County in 1849.

In the early 1860's the village of Centerville came into existence. St. John's Lutheran Church, a Catholic Church, Scheibe's Brewery, a mill, and several stores made up the village. It was located right on the Lake. The first post office was established in 1855. Two more post offices were later on established in the Township. They were located in Cleveland (Centerville Station), and in St. Wendel (named after the Catholic Church located there.) All three of these areas make up the village of Cleveland today, as the village today stretches out for about four miles from Lake Michigan. *westward.*

Up to 1847, the principal means of livelihood of the settlers in Wisconsin was cutting trees, the manufacture of lumber, and catching fish for the eastern markets. The attention of incoming settlers at this time was drawn toward the land. The Saxons were a classic example of this. Corn, wheat and oats were the classic grains grown here. This area being right off the Lake soon gained the reputation for producing the sweetest peas in the entire country. Today the area is still very productive for the crop.

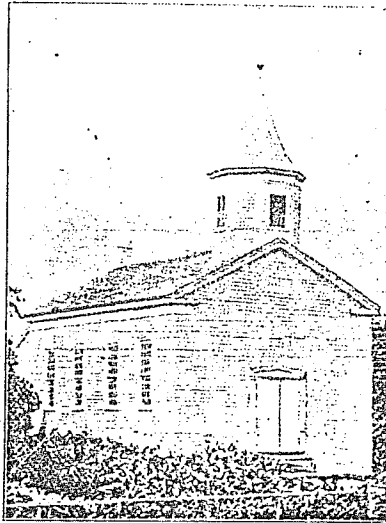
#### The First Decade

At the Synod meeting of June 15, 1851 two candidates were commissioned to serve in this area inhabited by the Saxons. They were C. F. Goldammer of Ursperg, Saxony and Licentiate Pluess.

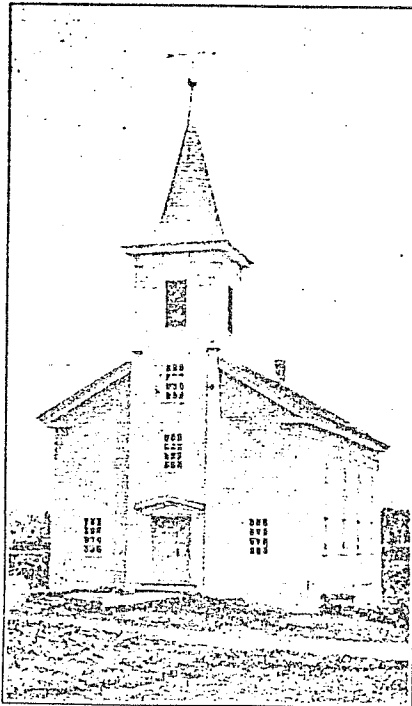
The synodical meeting realized the need of a traveling missionary but since such an appointment was not yet feasible, the pastors were urged to cover as much territory in their vicinity as possible. This, along with the fact that Pleuss had studied under the Swiss Scholars, and that Goldammer had studied at the Barmen Missionary Society which was a union society helps to explain some of the rather unusual happenings. Goldammer was sent to serve people in Newtonburg, located in the Northern part of the Township of Newton. He quickly followed the instructions of the Synod. Not only did he serve the congregation in Newtonburg, but he also served in an Evangelical Reformed church in Newton for a short time. His mission endeavors also led him into Manitowoc. The congregation there also had an element of Reformed members. They helped support the church, but refrained from attending the Lord's Supper. The church at Newton didn't receive his services for very long. Because of the large number of Reformed Germans, particularly from the region of Lippe Detmold, there was a desire to form their own Seminary in the area. They didn't want to wait for the Mission societies to send a preacher, and very likely didn't appreciate those pastors serving both the Lutheran and reformed. The Seminary was built in the Town of Herman in Sheboygan County. It was called Mission House. Today it is known as Lakeland College. It has for some time abandoned its Seminary program.

Pastor Pleuss was serving people in Sheboygan. He ran into trouble with that group and refused to defend himself. He later joined a Reformed group. In the meantime, Goldammer served the group in Sheboygan.

Eventually, Goldammer moved to Manitowoc to concentrate on that congregation. W. Streissguth replaced him at Newtonburg. The Missouri Synod meanwhile had been serving Sheboygan with Pastor L. Dulitz of Milwaukee. In 1853 they decided to send a full-time pastor to Sheboygan. Otto Eisfeldt, a recent seminary graduate, also served a congregation in Howards Grove (Town Herman) and one in Town Wilson, south of Sheboygan. In 1853 the Congregation served by Pastor Eisfeldt officially organized. The young Pastor met an early death. In 1855 he was replaced by the Rev. F. Steinbach. In January of that year the congregation officially adopted the name of Trinity Church of the German Evangelical Lutheran Unaltered Augsburg Confession. In May of the same year they became formally affiliated with the Missouri Synod. After Pastor Steinbach accepted a call to Milwaukee, Pastor Daniel Stecher came to Trinity in 1858. In the same year J. Phillip Sprengling took over as Pastor at Newtonburg. The church there had by this time become self-supporting. Pastor Sprengling seems to have been extremely active in opening new missions. At Hika in Centerville a group began to form. It seems most likely that Pastor J.P. Sprengling served them, *in the same way that he served* a group of Saxons in Mosel that were organizing. Located in the village of Haven was St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. It officially organized in 1859. A branch (filiale) church also formed on March 21 of that year. It was known as Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. It was located only a few miles south of St. Peter's. Both churches subscribed to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.



**St. John Ev. Lutheran Church — Hika, Wisconsin  
1860 - 1923**

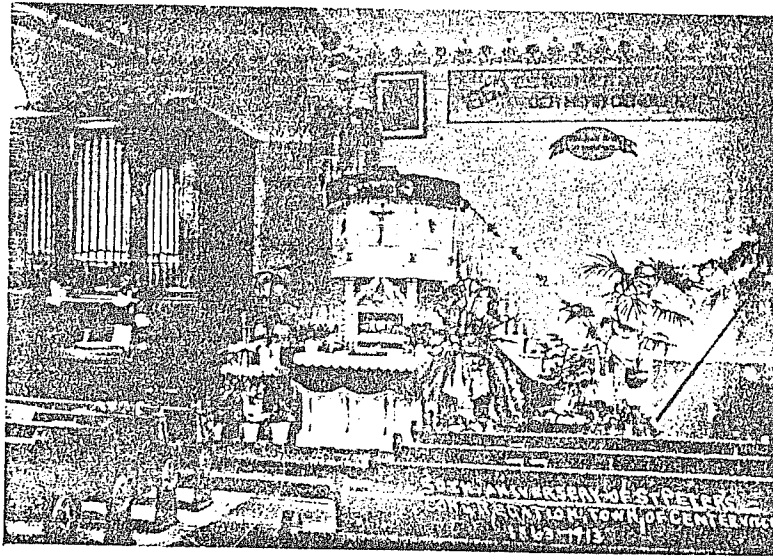


**St. Peter Ev. Lutheran Church — Town of Centerville, Wis.  
1863 - 1923**

This concludes the first decade of the Mission endeavors to a people who in the majority were from Saxony. The exact reasons for their immigration is not known by this writer. As we have seen their reasons may vary greatly. Personal interviews would have to be conducted extensively to help determine this. Few of the Germans, with the exception of those who like the Missourians and Buffaloes had emigrated on account of their faith, seem to have had a clear conception of their confessional stand. It is interesting to note that all the church records that this author had read, had subscribed to the unaltered Augsburg Confession. Also like the Missourians, these people were from Saxony. Already we can detect the close ties that existed between the Missouri congregation in Sheboygan and those Wisconsin Synod congregations, northward toward Manitowoc. Outside of those who had suffered persecution, the clearest church consciousness obtained with those hailing from section where there was only one confession. Thus the Pommern, Posener, Preussen, Brandenburger, Mecklenburger, Hannoveraner, scattered over the whole state, then the Sachsen at Centerville and Mosel, were Lutheran. It is also noteworthy that the early congregations of the Synod were not gathered by ministers, but that the people themselves banded together in order to procure preachers and teachers.

#### THE MISSION WORK EXPANDED

J.P. Sprengling continued his amazing mission endeavors. He went to Sheboygan to revive the work that Pastor Weitbrecht had done in succession to Pastor Pleuss. And in Hika, Town of Centerville on September 27, St. John was founded. Since Pastors were not always available to serve them on Sunday morning, the



**CHANCEL - St. Peter Ev. Lutheran Church  
1863 - 1923**

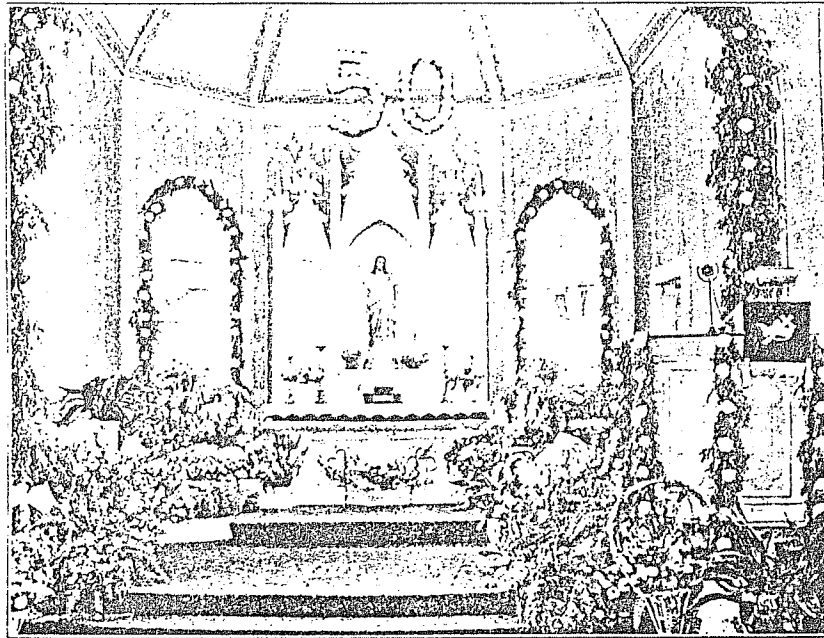


**CHANCEL - St. John Ev. Lutheran Church  
1860 - 1923**



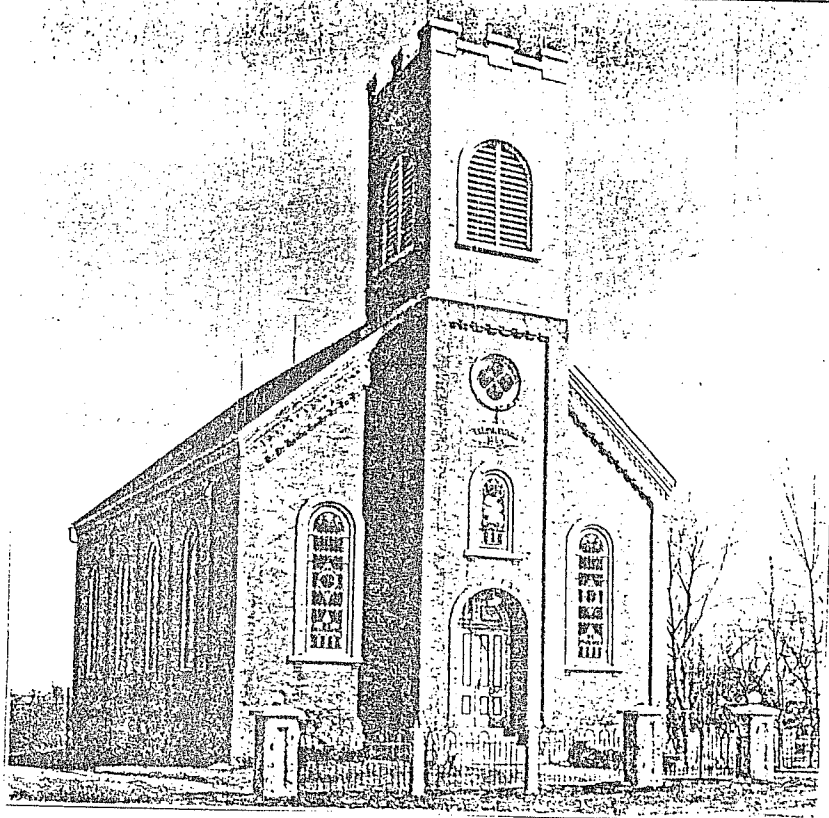
congregation chose members to read a prepared sermon; all participated in prayer and the singing of hymns.

Meanwhile the records of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, located in Town Herman indicate that they were organized in 1862. The first service was rendered, of course, by Pastor Sprengling. A document was discovered which states that six congregations were organized in 1860. St. Paul's of Town Herman is mentioned as one of the six. Other evidence bears witness to the fact that the congregation was organized before 1862. If we would attempt to make a count, perhaps we might come up with the six. St. Paul's is one; St. John #2; counting St. Peter's and Immanuel of Mosel #'s 3&4 (we already stated that they were organized in 1859); Pastor Juroff, the present Pastor of St. Paul's told this writer about another Lutheran Church just down the road from St. Paul's. It is St. Luke's. Formed about the same time as St. Paul's it later joined the ALC, because that was the only Synod that could provide it with a Pastor. #5; #6, the final church to be established in/about 1860 -- could this be the Saxon Church? The official church name was St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church. This church was located in town Centerville about four miles West from St. John Church in Hika. It was usually referred to as the Saxon Church because its members had come from Saxony. Ferdinand Andreas Klessig had been a member of this church. There are conflicting reports as to when this church was formally founded. Most records seem to indicate that it was in 1863. However, this may be due to the fact that in that year the first church building was completed. Very few records were kept in those days. We know that the members had District School #3 at their



Picture of interior of church at the 50th anniversary of dedication

*St. Paul's - Millersville*



disposal for some of their meetings. It seems quite possible that this school was used for worship services prior to the completion of their own church. Incidentally, the Saxon Church was built right next to this school(also known as the Pleasant Hill school). Although the Church no longer is standing today, the cemetery at this site bears the name: Saxon Cemetery!

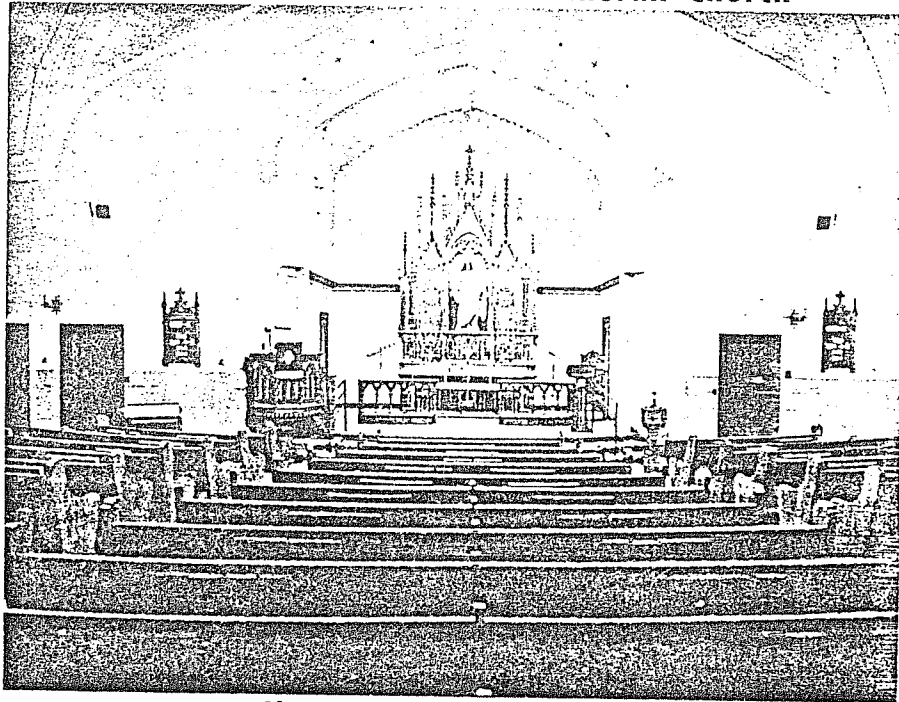
In 1862 Pastor H. Quehl was called by St. John in Hika to serve them. The members of St. Peter in Centerville, The Saxon Church, asked him if he could serve them, too. He consented, and so both these churches had their first full-time Pastor. He served both churches until 1868. In his first year as Pastor at St. John, pastor Quehl received an annual salary of \$240. In 1868 he accepted a call to First German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Manitowoc. Christopher Dowidat was then called to serve the two churches in Centerville. By this time J. Phillip Sprengling had become the resident Pastor of St. Peter's in Haven, Town Mosel. The branch congregation, Immanuel, located only a few miles away was served by Pastor Stecher of Trinity in Sheboygan, members of the Missouri Synod. Sometime later both of these churches in Mosel decided to join the Missouri synod. This seems to have been the result of a conflict with the Missouri congregation. These conflicts were not peculiar to Mosel and Sheboygan. The cause of the conflict is not completely clear. Eventually the Wisconsin Synod pulled out of Sheboygan. Not until 1969, was another Wisconsin Synod Church established in that city. Future Pastors of Trinity in Sheboygan were: O. Spehr-1872-1876; C.M.Zorn 1876-1881; G.Goehringer 1881-1884; F. Wolbrecht 1885-1910; C.P. Schulz 1910-1943; K.Schulz 1922-1978; F.Brauer 1944-53; H.Tornow 1954-1967; M.Hoyer 65-70 H.Krueger 1968- ; L. Deitemeyer 1971-77; L. Schmidt 1977- ;

Later history Of St.Peter's and Immanuel in Mosel was not available. The two churches did not remain separate. Sometime after 1950, I believe, they merged into one congregation. It is now known as Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Haven, Town Mosel.

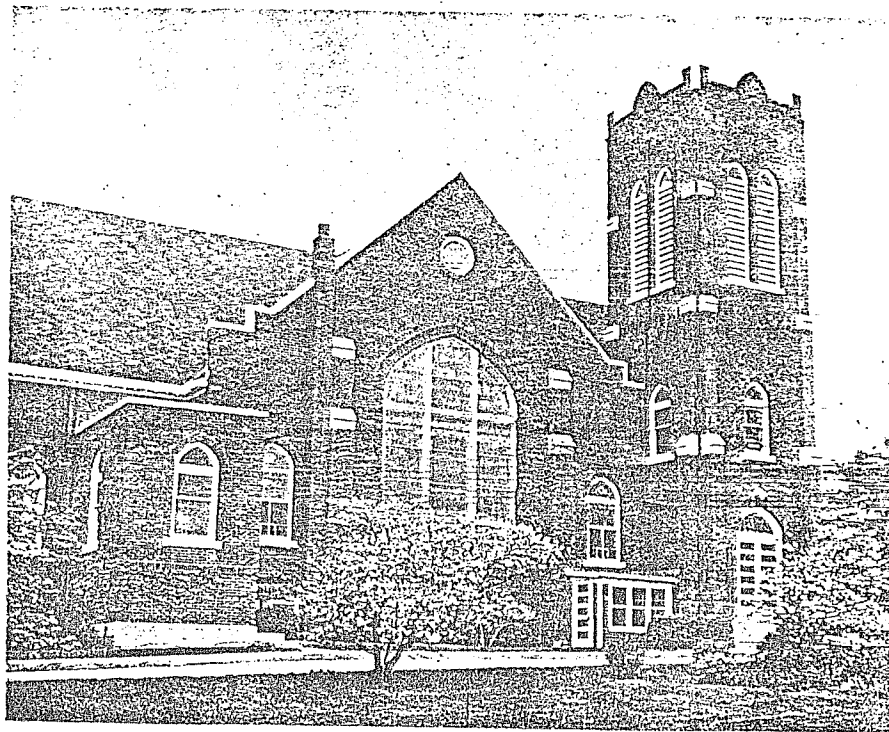
St. Paul's congregation in Millersville was served by John H. Brockmann and a Pastor for a short time after J.P. Sprengling's term. They were both pastors at Mosel. The congregation was incorporated in 1867 and called its first resident Pastor in 1870. Pastor August Kleinhans served them from that time until 1878. Pastor G.J. Hillemann served them until 1898. A new church was built during his period of service in 1884. Succeeding Pastors were: F. AveLallemant 1898-1909; L.B.Mielke 1909-30 H.A. Kuether 1930-1949; O.W. Heier 1950-1956; H. Meyer 1957-1962; The present Pastor is Henry Juroff 1962-;

Pastor Dowidat served the two Centerville until 1875 upon accepting a call to Fort Atkinson. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin, recommended to them the calling of candidate Franz Pieper. He accepted the call after finishing his studies at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He was originally a member of what is now First German Church in Manitowoc. At that time the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods had a joint Seminary in St. Louis. A joint college of the two was operated by our Synod in Watertown. After a very short time at Centerville Pastor Pieper accepted a call to his home congregation in Manitowoc where he served for two years. He served there from 1876-1878. Then he accepted a call to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis to teach Systematic Theology. In 1887 he replaced Dr. C.F.W. Walther as president of that institution. His lifework was devoted to his Christliche Dogmatik. His English version is still renowned among pastors today.

**St. John - St. Peter Ev. Lutheran Church**



**Chancel and Nave 1960**



**Exterior 1960**

Pastor J. Haase served from 1877 until 1883. He, too, accepted a call to Fort Atkinson. His successor was C. Jaeger who went to Racine four years later. In 1887 Pastor Phillip Sprengling, the son of John Phillip Sprengling, the early Missionary among the Saxons in this region, became Pastor of St. John and the Saxon Church. He served the church for 46 years. During the time of his ministry and service there, both churches celebrated their 50th Anniversaries (1910 and 1913). On Pentecost Sunday of 1920, a decision was reached to merge the Saxon Church and St. John together. The location would be half way between their old location in the village of Cleveland. The cornerstone was laid in 1922, and dedication for the new building took place in 1923. This building still ably serves the members even today. The new congregation was named after <sup>the original</sup> ~~ones~~; thus the unusual title: St. John - St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Pastor Sprengling resigned because of poor health in 1933. Succeeding Pastors were: M. Braun 1933-1950; E. Bode 1950-1959; Pastor Gerhardt Cares 1960-1967; Paul Knickelbein 1967-1968; and the present Pastor, Henry F. Koch 1969- ;

## CONCLUSION

The area of East-Central Wisconsin is one of the oldest mission areas of our Wisconsin Synod. The history of the area is closely connected with Lutheranism in America and with our Synod. The early settlers are the very people to whom our Synod sent Pastors. Even today, in all of these churches mentioned, the majority of their members can trace their their ties back to this pioneer period. For that reason, this topic should be of special interest to many of them.

The information included in this history is far from complete. Many areas can be further studied to shed light on the subject. A very intriguing follow-up would be the investigation of the early settlers roots. More and more information is being compiled every year to help people in the search for their ancestors. Boat records are becoming more and more extensive (although this author failed to find significant boat records pertaining to this topic.) The study of such an undertaking leads one to appreciate just how much the Savior meant to our forefathers. It shows us how the Lord has blessed his people through the years, and will undoubtedly shower upon us His blessings in the years to come.

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