

ARCHIVES

IOWA DISTRICT EAST

A History of St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran

There is a long chart posted in the Iowa District East Archives which lists the active and disbanded member congregations of IDE. The active congregations are under the watchful eye of The Good Shepherd and all kinds of people associated with them. As an archivist, what intrigues me is those congregations on the list which have gone out of existence and are fading from the memories of the members of our district. So I thought, why not try and gather some meaningful information about such congregations and introduce a memory of them into the lives of our IDE membership. Of course, I am aware that not everyone gets all that excited about history and things of the past, but it may be of interest to some to see how God once moved among people in a certain era to organize themselves in order to have a focal point to worship the Lord God and receive their strength for daily living at a place where Word and Sacrament were offered.

My first thought for writing about congregations no longer in existence was: Where do I start? It seems that of all the congregations ever associated with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Iowa, there are 19 of them, in what today is Iowa District East that were either absorbed into a nearby congregation, or simply closed down. One of the earliest congregations, established around 1855 and disbanded in 1921, is St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran Church of Center Township in Clinton County, Iowa. A detailed on-going chronicle of its history does not seem to exist. Brief mention is made in the history of a sister congregation and the church records of baptisms, confirmations, marriages and deaths are still preserved at St. John Lutheran in Clinton.

Imagine if we had the luxury of people hanging around as long as they did before the time of Noah. There would then be no need to resurrect a memory of the Center Grove church because original members would still be around to consult directly. But that is out of the question. So I am going to try and make up a story about the goings on of the Center Grove congregation by consulting the early history of that area and extracting information from St. Paul Lutheran's own church records.

Before the Church Arrived

In the 18th century, the Sauk and Meskwaki (or Fox) Native American tribes lived along the Mississippi River in what are now the States of Illinois and Iowa. The two tribes had become closely connected after having been displaced from the Great Lakes region in conflicts with New France and other Native American tribes, particularly after the so-called Fox Wars that ended in the 1730s. In an attempt to stem the tide of European movement westward and conflicts between various Indian tribes, another war broke out, known as the Black Hawk War, which came to an end in August of 1832.¹ The Indians were compelled to sell land west of the Mississippi River in what became known as the Black Hawk Purchase in 1832. This opened up "a strip of land on the west bank of the Mississippi River, the western

boundary of which commenced at the southeast corner of the present county of Davis; thence to a point on Cedar River, near the northeast corner of Johnson County; thence to the Mississippi to a point above Prairie du Chien, and contained about six million acres of land. By the terms of the treaty, the Indians were to occupy this land until June 1, 1833."ⁱⁱ

In the past, this land once experienced the movement of various Indian tribes. First the Illini, then the Winnebagoes, next the Iowans, and finally the Sac & Fox (a remnant still living in Tama County today).ⁱⁱⁱ White settlers found their way into the Dubuque area in 1833 to work at lead mining.^{iv} In 1835, where Lyon (now incorporated into the Clinton city limits), Iowa would eventually come into existence, Elijah Buel set up a ferry service with John Baker, on the east side of the Mississippi River, which would become Fulton, Illinois.^v The first session of the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature, held in 1836, the counties of Des Moines, Lee, Van Buren, Henry, Muscatine, and Cook (now called Scott), and Slaughter (now called Washington), were organized out of the original county of Des Moines. At the second session, which convened at Burlington, Des Moines Co., in November, 1837, the following counties were erected from the original Dubuque County : Dubuque, Clayton, Fayette, Delaware, Buchanan, Jackson, Jones, Linn, Benton, Clinton and Cedar.^{vi}

As settlers from the east came into the Clinton County area, the land was not devoid of Indian people. One can only imagine what relations were like between the native people and the new settlers. Although there were Indian attacks on settlements at times, there were also humane moments. There was a settlement of Indians at the Sac & Fox Camp on the Elk River (about 10 miles up the Mississippi from Lyon). Mr. Buel's wife once became very ill. Two squaws came down with him and, after carefully examining his wife, they went out and dug various roots, which they made into a tea, very weak at first and then stronger, and administered it to her. For six days and nights they watched her with sleepless vigilance, until she was on the way to recovery.^{vii} On another occasion, a drunk Indian threatened to shoot Buel. Mr. Buel took an iron skillet and knocked the Indian senseless. Indian companions took the drunkard home. Later, the Indian returned to apologize for how he had acted and left some honey with Mrs. Buel.^{viii}

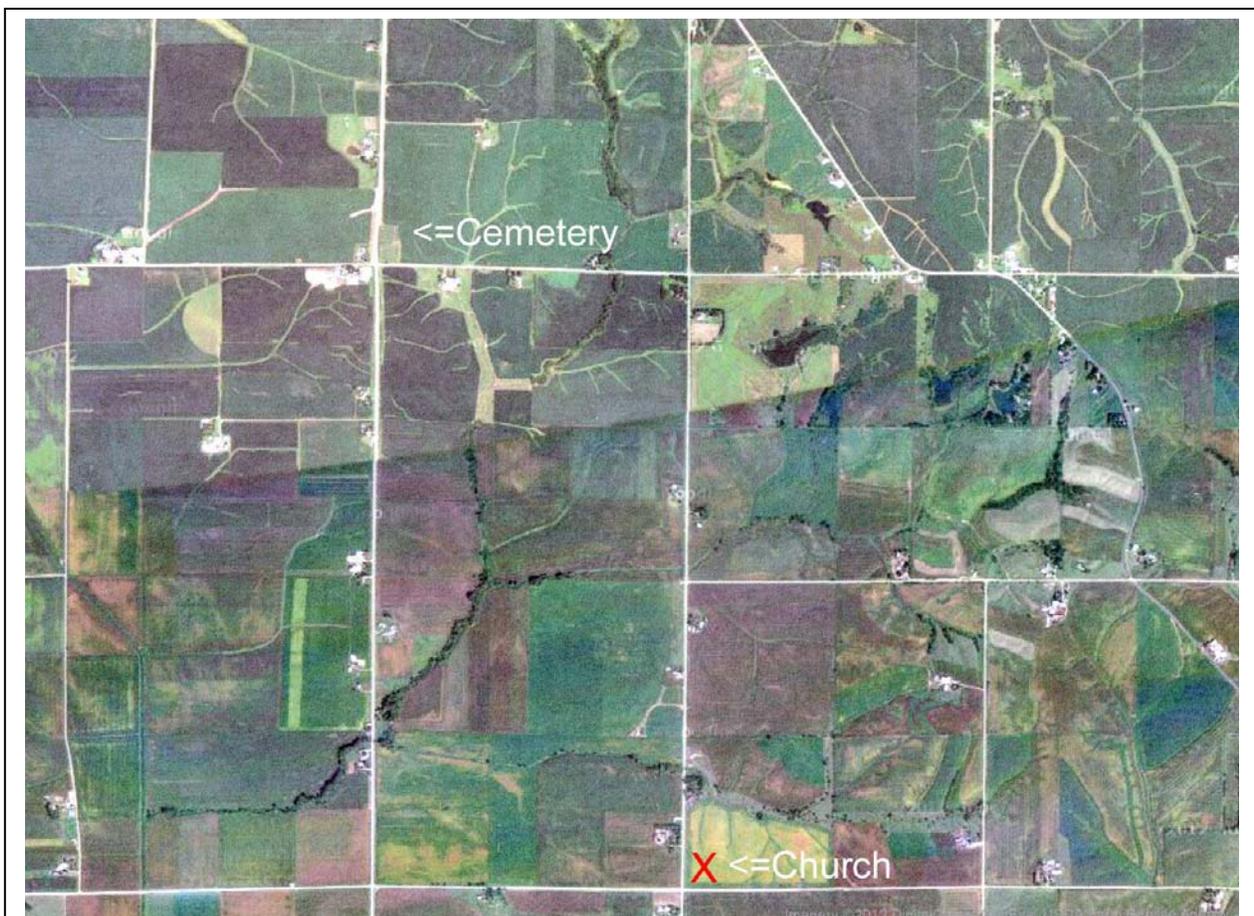
In 1837, the first horseback mail route was established between Lyon to Vandenburg (now DeWitt) & Grower's Ferry on the Cedar River.^{ix} Iowa Territory, formerly part of Wisconsin Territory, was organized 04 July, 1838, and known as the "Black Hawk" country.^x In 1839, someone ventured to plow a furrow along a section line from a place then known as New York (near Lyon), laid some logs across the streams, which then became the only road into the interior of that area. At that time, there were no settlements for twenty miles between Lyon and Harrison's log house at Round Grove (near DeWitt).^{xi}

Clinton County was officially organized in the Spring of 1840.^{xii} In the area roamed grey wolf, prairie wolf, lynx and wildcats. To encourage the down-sizing of certain wildlife, in 1845, the county paid out \$58 to different parties, for fifty-eight wolf scalps.^{xiii} The rattle snakes occupied the bluff along the Mississippi and the vipers the inland streams. Bison, grazing just north of the Clinton County line, blocked the US Army for 2 days in 1839.^{xiv} Prairie chickens, ducks, wild turkey, deer, blackberries, wild plums, and crab-apples provided food for the people.^{xv} The tax man made his appearance, too. The rate of taxation was fixed for the year 1841, as follows: Poll Tax, as established by Territorial statute, \$1. "First-rate lands shall be \$3 per acre; second-rate lands shall be \$2.50 per acre; third-rate lands shall be \$2 per acre. Ad valorem tax on all property, as valued and returned by the Assessor, five mills on the dollar."^{xvi}

A traveler to the region in 1885 had this to say about the area: “I started from Camanche, taking a westerly course toward De Witt. I came to one of the finest prairies I ever saw. It is spotted with groves, and plenty of springs of good water. The soil is a rich, black loam. The land is all bought, and mostly improved. In fact, the large fields and good frame buildings present the appearance of an old-settled country, although it is only three or four years since the majority of the farmers settled there. Yet I see a number of 80 or 160 acre cultivated fields that have yielded thirty bushels of wheat per acre, without manure. That is truly rich. The houses are good, large frame buildings, and painted. The barns and sheds have a neat appearance. The farm-yard is well stocked with cattle, sheep, hogs and horses, all of which they raise. The whole—even the fields—have a neatness almost equal to a gentleman's country residence. I do not think I have seen, anywhere, a more prosperous community of farmers.”^{xvii}

A Community Establishes Itself

Not satisfied with just reading about the area from other writers and viewing satellite maps on the internet^{xviii}, I decided to travel to the area and see it for myself. The south boundary of Clinton County is the Wapsipinicon River. Heading north, the land is flat river-bottom as it slowly rises toward Highway 20. Within the next five miles, passing through Center Township, the land turns into undulating hills that become more hilly and wooded as you approach County Road 136 which connects Goose Lake and Charlotte. At that point, you will find yourself in the area which was swampy, marshy land in the early pioneer days.



Satellite Image of Area Where St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran Church was Located

My focus now shifts more narrowly to that of Center Township, where the Lutherans eventually organized themselves into a congregation. Settler life started to stir in and around the vicinity within a mile west and couple of miles south of the church site. In 1851, there was only the Bohart house between what is Elvira today (junction of County Roads F12 & Z36) and the town of Camanche. Earhart was the only residence on the road to Lyons. The first tavern on the stage-route, between Lyons and De Witt, was kept by Jacob Lepper, at the grove in Section 13. It was of brick, and a well-known wayside inn.^{xxix} This is the same section which was eventually occupied by the Lutheran Church. It is interesting to note that what was called a grove in Section 13 is today land mostly cleared of trees and is used for crop farming. Center Township was organized in March, 1852, and the first election was held in April, at Lepper's house.^{xxx} A post office was established at Suffolk, where Elvira now stands. Soon afterward, many energetic settlers arrived and began to convert the prairie into homesteads. Among them were the families of Thiessen, Ahren, Kinkaid, Kellogg, Ingwersen, Traver and Rice.^{xxxi}

I came across an interesting document which helps me to day-dream about the kind of challenge God's people would be facing in that new territory they were settling. If it is true that work was begun by Lutherans in 1855, then a special U.S. Census of Center Township, taken in 1856, gives an insight into the kind of population there was for the folks to heed the call of Jesus to "go and make disciples". The census lists 473 European souls living in the township. 128 of those are males that are 21 years of age and older. 90 are females that are 21 years of age and older. The remaining 255 are souls under the age of 21. Of the 473 enumerated, there were 197 souls who were not born in America. The birthplace was (01) from Canada, (18) from Denmark, (46) from England, (88) from Germany, and (44) from Ireland. There were 61 born in Iowa, but all are younger children. The place of birth for the rest was as follows: (03) from Connecticut, (06) from Illinois, (10) from Indiana, (02) from Kentucky, (06) from Massachusetts, (05) from Maine, (05) from Michigan, (01) from North Carolina, (01) from New Hampshire, (02) from New Jersey, (34) from New York, (31) from Ohio, (103) from Pennsylvania, (03) from Virginia, and (03) from Vermont.^{xxxi}

Church Comes To Center Township

Where people of the Lord Jesus settle down, one can anticipate the establishment of a church. Out of the growing towns to the east of Center Township, representatives of the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and Congregational churches were traveling between Camanche, Lyons and Dewitt.^{xxxi} One can only assume that these men also passed through the Center Township area and may have attempted to establish some kind of ministry for their particular denomination. On 26 December, 1853, an Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church was organized at the house of Jacob Bohart, in Center Township, to be called the Congregation of Pleasant Prairie, and under the care of the Presbytery of Keokuk. Fifteen members were present at the first communion. In 1855, Pastor Clark was called to serve, but, in 1856, he was killed by lightning. In 1856 they erected a 36' x 44' wooden church-building in Elvira.^{xxxi} On Sunday, 03 June, 1860—known as Tornado Sunday—3 miles SW of De Witt, two tornadoes, causing much damage to the west, united into one and tore through wooded areas, killed 28 people and wounded 51 between De Witt and Camanche, and then Camanche, population of some 1,200 people was almost completely destroyed with even more deaths.^{xxxi} I mention these events so that one gets an idea what the talk of the community might have been at that time and giving the settlers pause think more about getting even more focused on the things of God

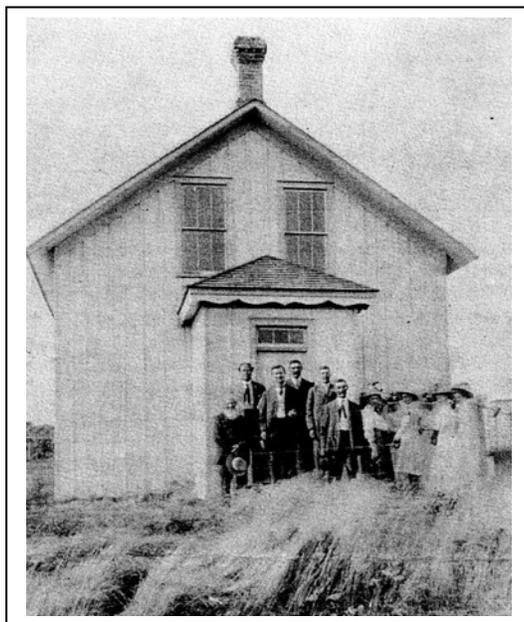
The official records of the Lutheran congregation begin in 1861. Since there is no evidence of the construction of a church building at that time, one may assume the people gathered in a public school building, or, more likely, in a private home. The church ledger shows the following baptisms: 08 December, 1861 (Sunday)—Margaretha Justine & Johann Heinrich, children of Claus Dettloff & Margaretha (Rohrberg) Rönnfeld. 18 May, 1862 (Sunday)—Robert Johann Friedrich, son of Andreas & Louise (Stüdemann) Schwarz. 01 June, 1862 (Sunday)—Hans Heinrich, August Heinrich and Margaretha Friedericka, children of Jürgen H. & Friedericka (Jöngk) Bock. Then there are no more entries until 1866. A funeral is also entered into the record: 24 February, 1861, Bertha, the 10 year old daughter of Joh. Stüdemann. None listed then until 1867. For whatever reason, Lutheran outreach seems to have ended in 1862. Pastor Friedrich might have departed. Pastor Oswald was still active in Lyons, but no longer serving the folks at Center Township. There may have been a lack of interest at the time and so things fell silent.

Four years later, in October of 1866, Pastor Seuel came to Center Township and started to preach the Word of God.^{xxix} Now things began to come alive. The first communion of which we have a record was celebrated on Sunday, 23 June, 1867. Communed were: Jacob Maier & wife, Lor. Levsen & wife Cath. Levsen, Rich. Levsen, Andr. Levsen, Agathe Levsen, Heinr. Peters, Peter Peters, Carl Peters, H.P. Hansen, Peter Hansen & wife Maria Hansen, Anna L. Hansen, Fr. Voss & wife Cath. Voss, Wilke & wife, Wenzel, Joh. Brandenburg & wife, Karl Schwartz, Wilh. Schwartz, wife Koepke, wife Stuedemann Sr., Fr. Holtz & wife, Aug. Giermann & wife, Christ. Seer, Claus Gluesing, Wilh. Grot, Jens Bussen & wife, Henry. Husmann, Mantje Hansen, Miss Maria Scheel. Pastor Seuel also initiated a parish 'school' at Center Grove and was assisted in conducting it (no doubt in some private home) from 01 January, 1867, on by Mr. Louis Stiegemeier, student of theology. That same year, on Sunday, 17 February, Peter Petersen (from Schleswig/Germany) & Friderike Agathe Claussen (from Schleswig/Germany) were the first to be registered as being married in the church.

In March, 1868, St. Paul's was organized as a congregation and decided to build a church, school and parsonage.^{xxx} A parcel of land was set aside on the southwest corner of the southwest quarter of section 13, in Center Township. Today, you can find that place at the junction of 390th Avenue (running north and south) and 190th Street (running east and west). The congregation incorporated on 01 May, 1868, with ten charter members: Ludwig Lamp, Hans Moller, Heinrich Wehland, Jacob Maier, Aug. Schlemme, Gerhard Lange, Andreas Schwartz, Wilhelm Mohr, Friedrich Schoening, and Johann Stuedemann.^{xxxi} However, the church ledger, on it's Constitution page, lists the following first 10 signatures, probably indicating charter members, in this order: Andreas Schwartz, Wilhelm Möhr, Heinrich Wehland, Jacob Maier, J.H. Sängler, Ludwig Lanz, Johann Stuedemann, Friedrich Schwartz, Fririk Gohöhrtnig, and widow Stuedemann. Then follow 31 more names, dated all the way up to 1912. The first confirmation class, conducted by Pastor Claus Seuel on Sunday, 05 April, 1868, was made up of Wilhelm C.J.F. Schwartz, Albert C.J. W. Stuedemann, Johann C.M. Brandenburg, Wilhelmine F.C. Schwartz, Bertha C.F.L. Schwartz, Anna Gluesing, Auguste J.C.J. Wilke, and Johanna M.S.F. Brandenburg.

A church building was put up and it also served as the congregation's school house. A parsonage was attached to the north side of the church building in 1873. As Pastor Carl Seule was ministering to these people, while still serving Lyons, he was also attending to the spiritual needs of the people living in the Goose Lake area, some 5 miles to the northwest of the St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran Church, and also those in the Charlotte area. Pastor Seule stopped serving the Center Grove community in 1868. On

24 January, 1869, the Rev. Chr. Hartmann was installed as pastor of St. Paul's, but after only a year, on 25 January, 1870, he left to accept a call elsewhere. He was succeeded by the Rev. Louis Stiegemeyer, who had meanwhile been graduated from the seminary.^{xxxii} For the Germans near to Charlotte, traveling down to the Center Grove church location was not convenient. To attend worship there meant that they had to cross to the east side of Goose Lake Valley which at that time was marshy and difficult to travel across.^{xxxiii} So, in 1873, when Immanuel Lutheran was organized in Charlotte, it might well be that the size of the St. Paul (Center Grove) congregation diminished. In the summer of 1876, on the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, Pastor Stiegemeyer left Center Grove 'because of constantly decreasing interest in church affairs in Center Grove,' accepting a call to Dubuque. The 'few faithful' (we are quoting from the record) thereupon called on the then pastor of Lyons, the Rev. J. Fackler, to serve them as an affiliate of St. John's. They continued to be served in this way by subsequent pastors of St. John's. With the passing of the horse and buggy days, and the advent of the automobile and better roads, the congregation, the last minutes of which are dated 03 October, 1915, dissolved itself in 1921, releasing its members to the Lyons congregation, where its official records are preserved. Its buildings were removed from the premises, and the land on which they stood reverted to the owner of the farm of which it was a part.^{xxxiv}



St. Paul (Center Grove) did not have its own cemetery. Two miles to the north, and a mile west of the Lutheran site, there is what was known as the Ingwersen Cemetery; today, Center Grove Cemetery. Many of its members and their descendents are buried there.^{xxxv}



Summary Of Official Acts

Now to take one last look at some of the activities that took place at St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran Church. From the detailed church records on microfilm at the IDE Archives, here is a summary of events recorded in the life of the congregation. Since the congregation did not cease to exist officially

until 1921, one might assume that events celebrated in the congregation during those final years are recorded in the church records of St. John Lutheran in Clinton.

- (1) **Baptisms:** 1866—(total during year=15); 1867—(24); 1868—(23); 1869—(40); 1870—(06); 1871—(31); 1872—(41); 1873—(78); 1874—(68); 1875—(58); 1876—(20); 1877—(05); 1878—(12); 1879—(03); 1880—(06); 1881—(06); 1882—(12); 1883-1888 listings in Clinton/Lyons Church Book pages 240-265); 1889—(01); 1890—(23); 1891—(07); 1892—(06); 1893—(09); 1894—(07); 1895—(04); 1896—(08); 1897—(03); 1898—(05); 1899—(none); 1900—(04); 1901—(none); 1902—(02); 1903—(03); 1904—(04); 1905—(02)
- (2) **Marriages:** 1868—Schultz/Wendt; 1869—Schmidt/Schell, Stöwer/Hartwig, Lass/Tamuis, Auhde/Eberhardt; 1870—Dohrmann/Feldmann; 1871—Stuedemann/Stoltenberg; 1872—Dohrmann/Feldmann, Moeszinger/Schwartz; 1873—Jessen/Quitow, Luth/Jepsen, Wenzel/Schwartz, Petersen/Hansen, Stuedemann/Mueller, Christiansen/Friedricksen, Lass/Jensen; 1874—Schultz/Schurke, Bondtschneider/Grantz, Dohrmann/Tomsen, Carstensen/Nahnsen, Hansen/Jessen; 1875—Stehe/Brandenburg, Paulsen/Schroeder, Roeder/Spesk, Beymann/Heitt, Lueth/Wenzel; 1876—Schwartz/Lorenzen, Schultz/Buggo, Teut/Boysen, Pohlmann/Schwartz, Fester/Lamp; 1877—Schwartz/Rockrohr, Hollander/Reinke, Schroeder/Schoening; 1878—Scheer/Lamp; 1882—Brandenburg/Thiede; 1895—Buelow/Paasch; 1897—Schmidt/Möhr.
- (3) **Confirmations:** 1872—(17); 1873—(10); 1874—(11); 1875—(12); 1876—(10); 1877—(06); Last on 29 Jul 1894 by Pastor P. Meinecke—(03). The confirmations for Immanuel Lutheran-Charlotte, for 1874—(06) & 1875—(07) are listed in St. Paul's register.
- (4) **Communions:** From 1868—Good Friday until 1882, then no listing until 1890, then up to 1905.
- (5) **Deaths:** 43 funerals were conducted between 1867-1904

List of Pastors Who Served St. Paul Lutheran^{xxxvi}

Claus Seuel	1861-1868
Christian Hartman	24 Jan 1869-25 Jan 1870
Louis Stiegemeyer (student then pastor)	(1870?)-06 Aug 1875
John Peter Fackler	27 Nov. 1875-Dec 1882
H.W. Grumm	Mar 1883-Aug 1889
H.A. Meyer	Jan 1890-May 1892
P. Meinecke	Jun 1892-1895
C.A. Theo. Steege	1895-Jan 1906
Hugo Grimm	Jan 1906-Jun 1921

Appear And Disappear

What once was covered by woods, occupied by wild animals, and visited and lived on by native Americans, was vastly changed by the arrival of the settlers from the East. Trees were felled, buildings constructed, land cleared and drained for farming, and small villages appeared. People gathered

together in homes to worship their Lord and Savior. St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran came into existence. While people supported that congregation, spiritual and physical services were rendered to the community. However, as the vast distances in their world began to shrink and modes of transportation made it easier to get around...As simple paths turned into graveled, paved or cement causeways...As difficult streams and rivers were spanned with bridges...As urban areas began to lure the rural inhabitants to be in a more comfortable and easier to serve environment...the rural church started to be challenged. With diminishing membership, rising costs for supporting a physical facility and the costs of a resident pastor, some were able to extend their existence a bit longer by establishing a dual-parish relationship with a near-by congregation. But for St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran, the time arrived where the folks had to agree to close the doors and disband. Closing down is not an easy thing to do. The people of that time surely had many memories and loyalties to the place. But time eventually ushered those folks, with those memories, into the cemeteries. And, in time, who would even remember that there once was a Lutheran Church in Center Township? How fitting the words of Ecclesiastes 1:11 [TEV]: *No one remembers what has happened in the past, and no one in days to come will remember what happens between now and then.*

--Rev. Allen E. Konrad
IDE Archivist
September, 2012

END NOTES

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Hawk_War

ⁱⁱ Allen, Lucius P., *History of Clinton County, Iowa, Containing A History of the County, it's Cities, Towns, Etc. and Biographical Sketches of Citizens, War Record of it's Volunteers in the late Rebellion, General and Local Statistics, Portraits of Early Settlers and Prominent Men, History of the Northwest, History of Iowa, Map of Clinton County, Constitution of the United States, Miscellaneous Matters, &c, &c.*, Illustrated. Chicago IL; Western Historical Company, 1879, page 158

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 346

^{iv} *Ibid*, p. 337

^v *Ibid*, p. 338

^{vi} *Ibid*, p. 348

^{vii} *Ibid*, p. 341

^{viii} *Ibid*, p. 342

^{ix} *Ibid*, p. 342

^x *Ibid*, p. 343

^{xi} *Ibid*, p. 344

^{xii} *Ibid*, p. 350

^{xiii} *Ibid*, p. 364

^{xiv} *Ibid*, p. 330

^{xv} *Ibid*, p. 385

^{xvi} *Ibid*, p. 352

^{xvii} *Ibid*, p. 381

^{xviii} <http://www.acme.com/mapper/?lat=41.93306&long=-90.35361&scale=11&theme-image&width=3&height=2&dot=Yes> (Ingwersen Cemetery on the cross-hairs of that map)

^{xix} Allen, Lucius P., *op. cit.*, p. 640

^{xx} *Ibid*, p. 366

^{xxi} *Ibid*, p. 640

^{xxii} *1856 State Census of Iowa, Clinton County, Center Township*, Transcribed by Peggy Kelly. Copyright (c) 2007 by Peggy Kelly for the IAGenWeb State Census Project <http://iagenweb.org/census/>

^{xxiii} *Ibid*, pp. 365, 368, 392, 395

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- ^{xxiv} *Ibid*, pp. 640-641
- ^{xxv} *Ibid*, p. 398
- ^{xxvi} *Atlas of Clinton Co. Iowa* (drawn from actual surveys and the county records to which is added a Rail Road & Sectional Map of the State of Iowa), Harrison & Warner, Clinton, Iowa, 1874
- ^{xxvii} *St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran Church Record Ledger*, p. 427, attached to end of St. John-Clinton microfilm at IDE Archives [MS-7E].
- ^{xxviii} *A Brief History of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Clinton, Iowa*, document on file in St. John Congregation Archive Box, at IDE Archives, Marion, IA, (not dated).
- ^{xxix} *St. Paul (Center Grove) Lutheran Church Record Ledger*, op. cit., p. 427
- ^{xxx} *Historical Sketch 1855-1955 – St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Clinton, Iowa*, Published as a Memento of Its Centennial Celebrated In September, 1955, *St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church Center Grove, Center Township, Clinton County*, page 30
- ^{xxxi} *Ibid*, p.31
- ^{xxxii} *Ibid*, p. 31
- ^{xxxiii} *Steadfast in Faith – 125 Years of Grace 1873-1998 – A History of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Charlotte, Iowa* –IDE Archives, Marion, IA.
- ^{xxxiv} *Historical Sketch 1855-1955, op. cit.*, p. 31
- ^{xxxv} *Ibid*, p. 31
- ^{xxxvi} *Iowa District Pastors Combined 1856-2011*, Microsoft Excel document in IDE computer: Archives IDE Konrad/Church Workers, compiled by Allen E. Konrad—IDE Archivist.