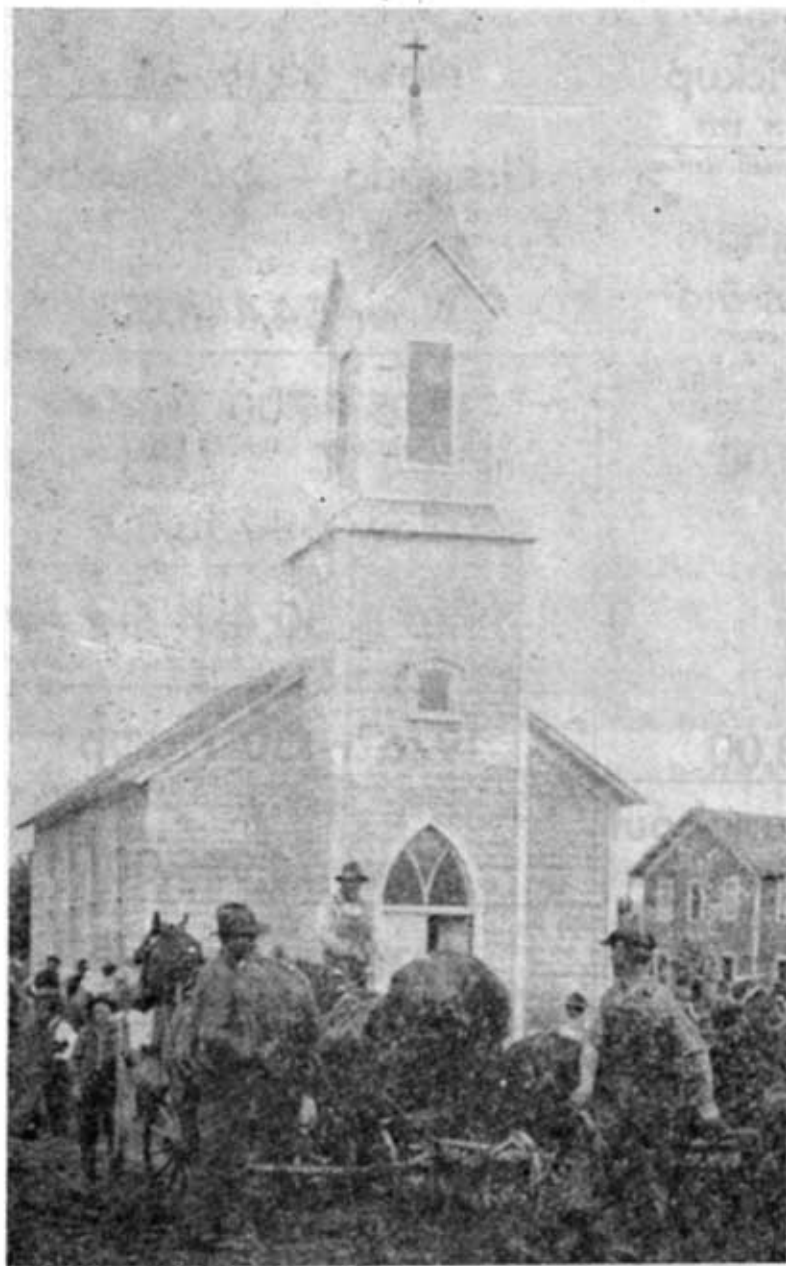


Backgrounds

In 1880s, When Traveling Pastor Arrived, It Was Always A Special Occasion



The original Zion Lutheran Church in Ashley, N. D. was built in 1903. Picture above was taken in the autumn of 1921 while workmen were excavating the basement for the congregation's second building (which was later replaced by a third building).

Churches have played a vital role in the development of this region—the Heart of the Dakotas. One of those was the Zion Lutheran Church congregation in Ashley, N.D. Its early history reflects typical problems, hardships, and joys which many pioneers encountered.

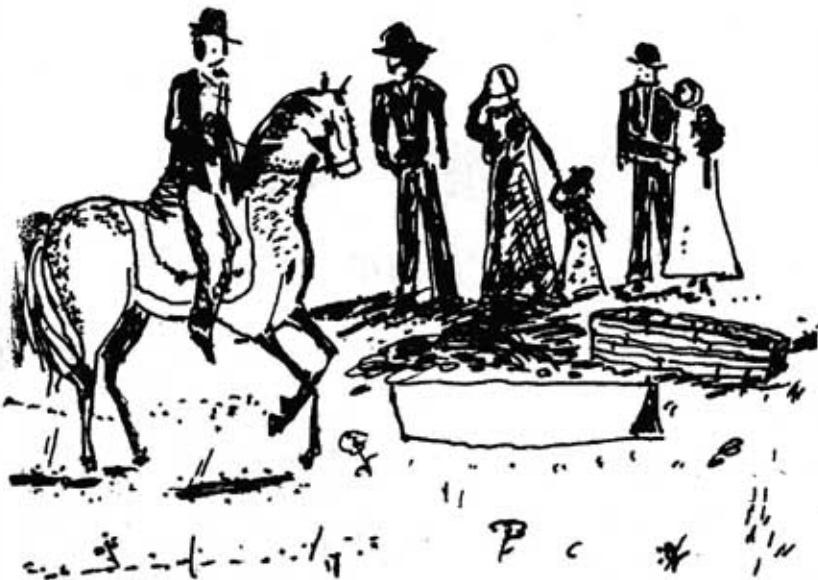
Zion's beginning as a congregation was generally the result of the work of Rev. Brunn, who served the rural area southeast of Ashley at about 1892, although considerable mission work had been done before that time. Rev. Friedrich Preu of Aberdeen, S.D., for example, made an extensive journey to McIntosh County in June 1885. On that trip he found a group of Lutherans, who had gathered together for a sad occasion. A child of Christoph and Rosina Nitschke had died, and the sorrowing family and friends were burying the child when Rev. Preu stopped, conducted a funeral service, and comforted the mourners. Undoubtedly, the pastor's presence reassured those early, struggling pioneers and gave them new courage.

It was a situation which many today cannot fully comprehend—a time and place when people had left all forms of organized society to start a new life on a lonely prairie. Old letters and diaries often speak of that loneliness, and describe too the times when a traveling pastor would arrive to conduct a worship service: it was always a special, very important event.

In the autumn of 1885, another pastor, Rev. Geissendoerfer, was instrumental in the formation of several congregations in McIntosh County. He spent the fall and winter visiting people for the purpose of starting a church, and in the spring of 1886, a meeting was conducted under the open sky on a prairie hill. It was decided to build a parsonage, which was dedicated in June 1886. It became the new home of Rev. Groenlund, who arrived that autumn, becoming the first Lutheran pastor in McIntosh County, serving for two years.

But by 1892, the county again had no pastor—and so pastors from other areas were shared, a common practice during such a time of emergency.

Then came Rev. Brunn in 1892. In 1896, he "started a preaching place" in Ashley, according to Zion's golden jubilee booklet. The energetic pastor



Family was alone at death of child when traveling pastor unexpectedly arrived at scene.

conducted worship services first in private homes, then in a schoolhouse, and finally, when they needed more room, in the courthouse. It is believed that a preliminary organization occurred in 1901, but there are no records to support that claim.

The real organization was on September 25, 1903. Records of that time are partially complete, but it is believed that charter members of the early congregation were Friedrich Rau, Gottlieb Becker, John C. Schaefer, Johann Schulz, Fred Brosz, Gottlieb Glaesmann, Gottlieb Balliet, Gottlieb Stepper and Friedrich Maier. At that meeting, it was decided to construct a church. By the spring of 1904, it was completed, at a cost of \$2,200. In that humble building, the congregation launched its important responsibility: to experience and share God's compassion with others, a responsibility just as important today as it was in the early days of this region. ■