

Princeton "Scenes from the Past" The early years of St. John's Evangelical Church History 1864 to 1884

Our fourth article is stepping away from the downtown area and focusing on St. John's Evangelical Church which is now located at 226 S. Clinton Street, Princeton.

Early records indicate that nine years after Princeton was founded in 1848, Lutheran families from the Montello, Mecan, and Newton areas called Paster Deihlman (who was a traveling preacher) to serve them. At that time he was the only Lutheran pastor in the area and records showed he performed a baptism of Emma Elnora Lueck in January 1861, the year the Civil War began. Deihlman was joined by Teacher Schultz in 1862.

The settlers in Princeton in these early days were from Prussia, Germany, England, Ireland and the eastern United States. In the spring of 1864 there were 16 Lutheran families in the Princeton area, and needing a more permanent spiritual leader, called **J J Kern** of Fond du Lac to be the first resident Lutheran Pastor.

Needing a location to meet, the group looked to the downtown for meeting space. Presently occupied as the Lehner/Sondalle Law Office, the 3 three story stone building provided a meeting place for the 16 families. Their primary task was organizing a Lutheran Congregation in Princeton. The family names were Dargatz, **Jahnke**, Persage, Lemke, **Lueck**, Luetke, **Maulick**, Reich, **Schwarz**, Weckworth, **Weist**, Seigler, **Thiel**, Sommerfeldt, **Schwanke**, and **E.T. Yahr**. The church constitution was filed (written in the German language) for St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church and was adopted. NOTE: The **highlighted names** are individuals/families who are buried in the City Cemetery.

Over the next few years, changes in the leadership took place with **Pastor Kern** leaving Princeton and moving to Iowa. He was replaced by Pastor J P Lucas who was sent to America by a Missionary Society in Germany. Pastor Lucas was young man, filled with great vigor and excitement. However, it was said there wasn't a great cooperation between Lucas and the parishioners. While holding several meetings to discuss construction of a church, time passed without a decision being made. Finally on December 26, 1866, with the necessary membership present, the first thing discussed at their meeting was construction of a new church. It was decided to build a church made of stone right next to the old parsonage, with a schoolroom in the basement. However two months later, another church meeting was held (2/1867) at their downtown meeting place and there were two changes made. The church would not be built next door to the parsonage but on the original land purchased when the church was organized, and the church would not be stone but wood. The church would be 46' x 28' and have a 4' above ground foundation. This first little church was built and dedicated in 1867. Feeling he wasn't accepted wholeheartedly by the congregation, Pastor Lucas left in 1868 and relocated in the Town of Franklin. For the next year, visiting pastors served the congregation.

**The "Hoyer" era.** In 1869, things changed for the better for this young Lutheran congregation. The Church members called **Johann "John" August Hoyer** of Eldorado to serve in Princeton. Moving to Princeton with John Hoyer was his 11 year old son **Adolph** and other family members. The relationship between the congregation and the Hoyer family flourished for the next 66 years. Pastor John served until 1864 and Adolph was the Lutheran Pastor from 1880 until 1935.

The congregation continued to grow. School was conducted in the parsonage and there were as many

as 125 baptisms performed in a year. Mrs. Hoyer was highly respected in the church and community. She passed away in 1876 and it was said that Princeton had never seen such a large funeral.

From the beginning Pastor Hoyer also served the congregation at Mekan which was organized in 1866. In the early years the Mekan Church was called the "Straw Church" because it was made of logs and had a straw roof. In 1872 Rev Hoyer also held services at St. Steven's congregation in Dayton which had about 75 families, and in 1878 conducted services in homes for some Lutheran families in Montello.

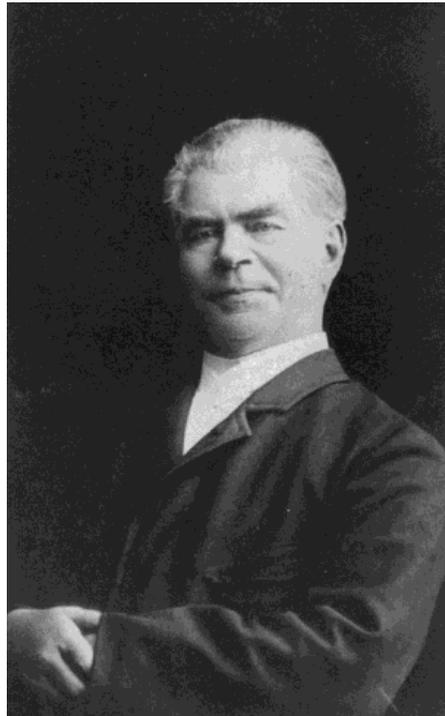
All in all, Hoyer cared spiritually for around 500 communicant members in the Princeton area. Considering the mode of transportation at that time was horse and buggy, Hoyer was a very busy man. In 1880, the younger Hoyer, Adolph joined his father in performing ministerial duties. Adolph married a local girl, **Clara Thiel** in May 1881 and the two Hoyer's worked together for four years until John retired to St. Paul.

The "Scenes from the Past" articles are published the second and fourth week in the Berlin Journal Newspapers. This story will continue the second week of April and will highlight the construction on the existing church and note other parishioners who are buried in the City Cemetery where both **Pastor John and Adolph Hoyer** are laid to rest.

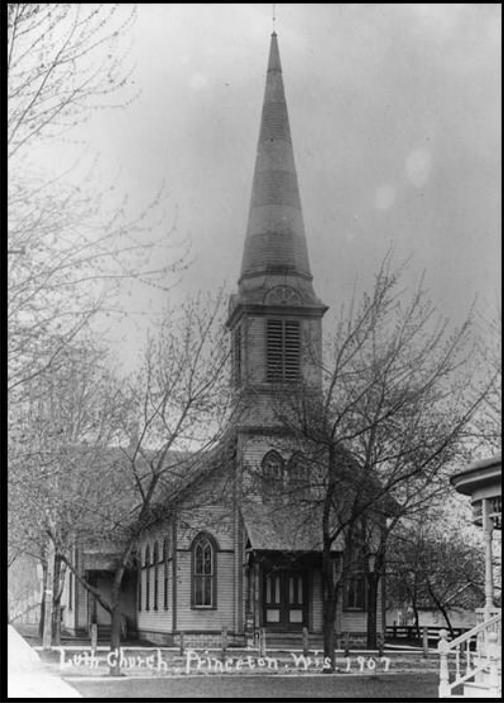
Information for this story came from the 1964 St. John's Centennial Jubilee Book. The Princeton Cemetery Walking Tour is planned for August 26, 2017 highlighting several of our forefathers who helped form Princeton's History.

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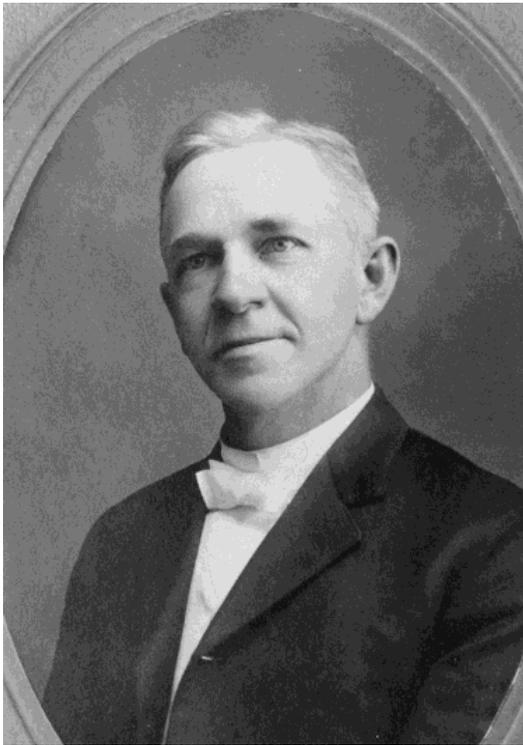
**\*\*\*Please scroll down for pictures\*\*\***



Pastor Johann "John" August Hoyer



St. John's Lutheran early Church



Rev. Adolph Hoyer