

"Daily Standard Freeholder" Commemorates 170th Anniversary Is Observed By Morrisburg Lutheran Church River 3182

By MABEL TINKISS GOOD

Closing doors and one hundred and seventy years of struggle, stress and loyal service were points emphasized in an impressive rite held last Sunday afternoon. In the beautiful little church on the shores of the St. Lawrence River just east of Morrisburg, St. John's Lutheran congregation celebrated the 170th anniversary of its beginnings in Upper Canada. Adding a touch of sadness to the festival of the day was the thought present in every mind that, quite possibly, it was the last occasion that the old Gothic interior.

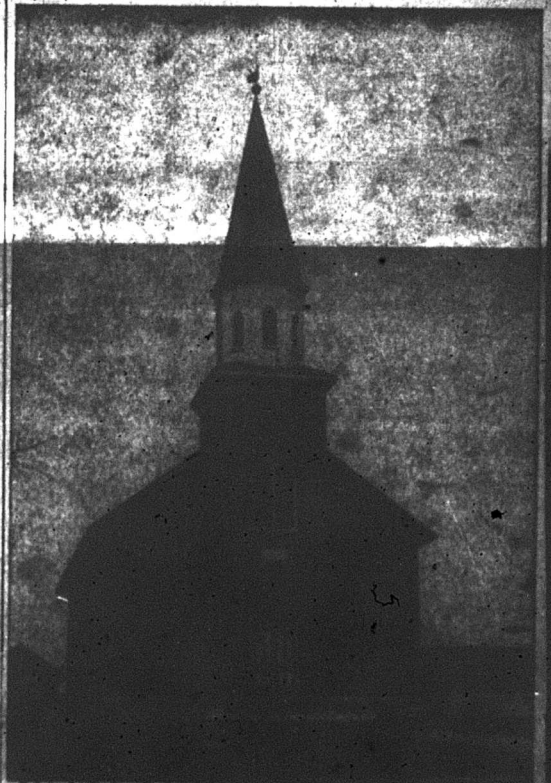
When United Empire Loyalists settled in this part of the St. Lawrence valley many of them were German Protestants seeking freedom from religious and other persecution for the second time in their history. Gratefully loyal to the British Crown which had befriended them under Queen Anne when they fled from the Fatherland, these Loyalists had, once again, exchanged comfortable homes in the American States for the privations and dangers of the then Canadian wilderness.

A number of these families retaining their German language and customs until after the War of 1812, banded together to form the foundation of the present Lutheran church in the Morrisburg district. At first their devotions were confined to lay readings and simple Sunday meetings, but very soon, in the fall of 1788, they began building a little frame church, on the centre of the Commons. Cold weather halted the work but in the spring of 1789 the church was finished under direction of Col. Henry Merkley, master-builder. A call was sent to the Rev. Samuel Schwertfeger (variously spelled) in Albany. Mr. Schwertfeger responded readily and became the first pastor of the Church which he dedicated in June, 1793, naming it Zion's Lutheran Church. The English settlers called it the "Dutch Church" and it has been referred to also as the German Protestant Church.

Under Mr. Schwertfeger who served 14 years, the church prospered and congregations were established at Aultsville and Iroquois. A parsonage was built and an orchard planted in 1793 on a globe to which the Lutherans were given under Governor Simcoe a licence of occupation, which implied granting of deed at a later date.

TROUBLES ARISE

Times were not easy or smooth in that early day of Canada, however, and soon troubles arose over the Church land. After several years of tribulation, discussion and petition the Lutherans, failing to obtain deed to the property, finally, under the zealous leadership of the pastor, Rev. Herman Hayunga



170th Anniversary of the MORRISBURG LUTHERAN CHURCH

who had begun his work there in 1830, built a new church at "Riverside" in 1833. This location is about two and a half miles east of Morrisburg and nearly 100 yards from the river. The old parish books carry this entry under date of July 14th, 1833.

"This day - the 14th of July, 1833 - the Lutheran new church on the Front was consecrated to the Service of Almighty God, by the Reverend Mr. Hermanus Hayunga, Pastor of the Lutherans in the Eastern District of U.C.

Text -

On the Purposes for which this Lutheran Church was erected. After consecration the Pastor declared the name of this Church to be and to continue the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. John's, at Williamsburgh."

So, on this other summer Sunday, these many years later, heirs to traditions established in loyalty and faith faced the thought of the closing of still another church, of other changes.

The theme of the day's St. Lawrence Lutheran Parish Bulletin was, most fittingly, "Be Still and Know that I am God."

Guest pastors were, the Rev. A. Conrad of St. Peter's Church, Ottawa, and president of the Eastern Conference, and the Rev. J. L. Kirchefer of Williamsburg.

Mr. Kirchefer spoke on the Scripture verse, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Heb 10:23). He sketched the historical and ancestral background of the congregation and urged the upholding of their traditions especially in two ways - by offering thanksgiving to God for the past, and by paying their vows to the Most High. Mr. Kirchefer declared that one of the greatest weaknesses in the religious structure of our day is the "lukewarm" attitude of professing Christians towards performing the several vows taken in church rites.

Rev. A. Conrad chose for his message the inspiring text from Revelations - "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man shall shut it."

POINTS TO FUTURE

From the President of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada and a former pastor of St. John's, the Rev. A. G. Jacobi. The message was as follows:

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Referring briefly to the heritage of the congregation, Mr. Conrad pointed stirring to the future. While realizing that the thoughts of many be dwelling on "closing doors" — "closed homes", "closed churches", — because of forthcoming projected changes, the speaker stressed the need for looking to the future as well as to the past. Where doors close others open. "It is the privi-

These will be new chances for service, with the influx of new people and perhaps new ways. Because their ancestors had proven themselves new doors had been opened to them and they had gone through to become "pillars of strength and beauty in the land."

"Only future generations will know," said Mr. Conrad, "whether or not you, too, go through the opening doors and become pillars."

The Scripture reading fittingly chosen and read by the Pastor Mr. Howald was "Let us hold fast the profession of faith without wavering" (Heb. 10:23). Music was under direction of the organist. Mrs. John W. Casselman and two effective solos, "Ye Gates Lift Up Your Heads" and "The Lord Is My Shepherd," were sung by Mrs. Robert Burns.

At the close of the service Rev. F. L. Howald read a message

from the President of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada and a former pastor of St. John's, the Rev. A. G. Jacobi. The message was as follows:

"To the Members of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Riverside, Ontario.

Greetings:

How I wish I could be with you kind people of St. John's on this happy occasion of your 170th anniversary as a congregation! How my heart would warm to your joy and thanksgiving for this great day 170 years of witness to the glory and mercy of a Redeeming Lord! A time of retrospect and a time of assurance and a time for resolution.

With the great St. Lawrence Waterway Development virtually a certainty this festival can easily become the last great festival you will have on this historic and hallowed piece of land. What memories must crowd in on your minds today! What does the future hold for you one of the oldest congregations of our Dominion?

The past is gone. It is ours only in memory. The future is in the hands of God. But if our present is spent with our Lord we need have no regrets or longing for the past and no fears for the future.

May this great anniversary be a special day of dedication for all of you. May you pray the Lord of the Church to consecrate you this day to the inspiring and soul warming mission of His Gospel.

The Lord bless you and keep you - all."