

The St. Lawrence Lutherans

RELIGIOUS LIFE

One of the first Protestant churches built in Upper Canada was built by the St. Lawrence Lutherans at Riverside, about three miles east of the present site of Morrisburg, Ontario. These Lutheran families, though without a pastor, did not forget their God. They began to hold lay-reading services in August, 1784. The hymns which they sang were all in the German language, the hymn book being the "Marburger Gesangbuch". The same year a messenger was sent to Philadelphia to purchase a book of printed sermons and one of the sermons was read each Sunday to the assembled congregation.

Five years after their settlement they began to build a frame church on the centre Commons, but because of the severe weather that fall they were not able to complete it. The work was undertaken anew in the spring of 1790 and pushed to completion under the direction of Colonel Henry Merkley, who served as the master builder. While engaged in building their church they sent a messenger to the Rev. Samuel Schwertfeger, who was residing near Albany, N. Y. Some of them had heard him preach before the war. The call extended through their messenger was accepted. Pastor Schwertfeger came immediately, and in June he dedicated the new church to Almighty God, naming it Zion's Lutheran Church. It was known as the "Dutch" church by the English and in some of the records it is called "The German Protestant Church."

In 1793 the congregation petitioned the provincial government for one half of the centre Commons as a glebe for their congregation. Their petition was favorably received and they were given a license of occupation which implied the granting of a deed at a later date. This land was cleared, an orchard planted, and a parsonage built.

Rev. Schwertfeger served the congregation faithfully for fourteen years. He rejoiced in the new liberty, for during the Revolutionary War he and his family had been cast into a dungeon and treated shamefully by the Republican forces. He was a true missionary, organizing Lutheran congregations at Aultsville and Iroquois. Many of his descendants are living in Dundas county. His name will ever live as a great pioneer of Canadian Lutheranism. He died in 1803 and was buried in the church cemetery. No lettered stone marks his grave.

Rev. Frederick A. Meyers was the second minister to serve the St. Lawrence Lutherans. His

father was a Lutheran clergyman who after the war had settled in the Bay of Quinty district and there served the Hessians and other Lutherans of Marysburg township. The son received much of his theological training from his father. Before leaving the Bay of Quinty district, Pastor Meyers was married to a daughter of Henry Smith, a prominent Lutheran of Marysburg. In 1804 he was invited to become the pastor of the St. Lawrence Lutherans. He accepted the invitation and was sent by the congregation to Philadelphia to be ordained. Upon his return he served the congregation acceptably until 1807 when he resigned to accept a call to Lancaster in Pennsylvania.

The third minister was the Rev. I. G. Weigandt, a son-in-law of Samuel Schwertfeger. He also came from the Bay of Quinty district where he had been serving a Lutheran congregation. He assumed charge of Zion's church in 1808. For three years an harmonious relationship existed between pastor and people, then disruption followed. Being enticed by a government salary of 200 pounds Sterling per year, he secretly joined the Church of England, and the troubles experienced by the Lutherans of Nova Scotia were to be repeated in Ontario. In 1811 Weigandt was ordained in Quebec by the Protestant Episcopal Bishop, Dr. Mountain. He appeared before his people as a Lutheran clergyman, but he had subscribed to the 39 Articles and he endeavored to introduce the forms of the Church of England. Soon the secret scheme was known and great confusion followed. Some followed him and he raised a Church of England congregation from among the Lutherans. From then on he preached in English and German but always read the prayers in English according to the "Book of Common Prayer". In 1814, the staunchest Lutherans who would not conform, invited the Rev. Frederick Meyers to return.

In mid-winter two sleighs were sent to Lancaster to convey his goods to Dundas county. Under the leadership of Meyers the Lutherans demanded their church and parsonage but Weigandt refused to accede. He placed a padlock on the door and forbid anyone to enter unless they acknowledge the 39 Articles. For a time Pastor Meyer preached in homes and school houses. Finally a compromise was effected. The Lutherans were given the use of the church every second Sunday but Weigandt refused to give up the parsonage. Since the Lutherans had only a License of Occupation and not a

ers". There were also a number of Palatines in Butler's Rangers. These battalions fought nobly and loyally on the British side until the end of the conflict. These German Lutheran Palatines are thus worthy of the title "United Empire Loyalists."

The soldiers of Sir John Johnston's regiment, after the conflict, were quartered at Isle Aux Noir at the northern end of Lake Champlain. Here they were met by their wives and families and in the spring of 1784 were conveyed by Batteaux up the St. Lawrence to Dundas county. Their hardships

and conflict had fitted them for the gigantic task of hewing down the forest and establishing a new home, under British institutions.

That the Lutheran settlers who landed in the county of Dundas, June 20, 1784, were the children of the German Palatines who labored at Livingston Manor under Governor Hunter from 1710 to 1713, is yet on file. That list contains such names as Gariough, Casselman, Shell, Merkley, Becker, Dillabough. These names are repeated many times in the Lutheran Church Registers of Dundas County.

clear deed to the property it was difficult to take any action.

For three years Meyer lived in poverty supported meagerly by his faithful people who gave what they could toward his support. At the same time Weigandt was living well on the 200 pounds per annum. When an invitation was given to Meyer to conform to the Church of England, the temptation proved to great for him. In 1817 he resigned his charge and went to Quebec to be reordained by the Church of England. When he returned to Upper Canada he took charge of a congregation at Iroquois, which had been founded by Schwertfeger, and from that time on it lost its Lutheran identity. Frederick Meyers soon met with an accident which hastened his death. His body lies buried in the old cemetery situated on Highway 2, 2 mile east of the village of Iroquois. Weigandt continued to serve as a Church of England clergyman until 1835. His remains were interred in the cemetery at Riverside. His tombstone reads thus: "In memory of the John S. Weigandt who died Nov. 20th, 1835, aged 73 years."

For nine years (1817-1826) there was a destructive interim. Only occasionally were they visited by John P. Goertner, a theological student of Hartwick Seminary, who had been given a license to preach by the New York Ministerium and who did noble work as a traveling missionary in Canada. In 1825 Rev. Senderling visited them for a short time, but did not accept a call.

Sad indeed was the condition of the Lutherans in Dundas county. They were without a church, drifting away from their faith, and distrusting any Lutheran clergymen who might come to them lest he prove to be like Weigandt or Meyer. It was then that the Macedonian Call came to the Rev. Herman Hayunga, who was serving as a professor in Hartwick Seminary. He resigned his chair at the Seminary and went in 1826 to the St. Lawrence Lutherans. It is due to the efforts of this man of God that there are four Lutheran congregations in Dundas county today. Like the Apostle Paul he had a "Thorn in the Flesh" a physical weakness, but with energy and zeal and an undying love for the Lutheran church, he courageously met the conditions. He labored unceasingly, visited from house to house, overcame the distrust of the people, withstood appeals and bribes from without and brought order and growth out of chaos. He had the satisfaction of seeing immediate fruitage of his work. In one year he had gathered together a goodly congregation at Riverside and had established a new congregation at North Williamsburg, ten miles from the Mother Church. This second church was built by the Lutherans and Presbyterians jointly and was dedicated by Rev. Hayunga, June 24, 1827. A new church (St. Johns) was built at Riverside in 1833 on a site donated by Conrad Frymire and situated at a short distance from the first church which was then in full control of the Church of England, they having secured a deed for it. Rev. Hayunga contributed generously toward the erection of both these churches. The church records indicate that he assisted out of his private funds to the extent of \$240. When it is recalled that his salary seldom exceeded \$200 per annum the sacrifice which his gift entailed can better be understood. Hayunga recognized the need of English services. He safely

brought the people through the transitional period. At first he preached English and German alternately and toward the end of his pastorate restricted himself entirely to English. In 1837 because of ill health he was obliged to resign, but continued to reside in Williamsburg township and served during vacancies and other intervals. He departed this life February 4, 1872. Loved and honored by the Lutherans of Dundas county. Forty-six years he spent in the midst of the St. Lawrence Lutherans. His body lies buried in the cemetery at St. John's Lutheran Church, Riverside.

Father Hayunga was succeeded by the Reverend Simeon Dederick who served St. John's, Riverside, and St. Peter's, Williamsburg, for a period of two years. Rev. William Sharts took charge of the parish in 1840 and served both churches until 1858. During his pastorate, in 1846, the government recognizing the injustice of the past, granted the Lutherans of Williamsburg a sum of \$2000 and 37½ acres of land. With the departure of Rev. Sharts the parish was divided. Rev. A. L. Bridgeman took charge of the flourishing St. Peter's congregation at North Williamsburg and Rev. Hayunga served St. John's until the arrival of Rev. J. H. Hunton in 1861. The present St. John's church was erected in 1863.

During the pastorate of Rev. Hunton (1861-72) Lutheran services were commenced at Morrisburg. The erection of a new church (St. Paul's) was started by the Rev. A. Schultz and was completed (1876) under the direction of the Rev. J. Fishburn, who was at that time president of the Canada Synod and pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church, North Williamsburg. From that time until the present, with the exception of a three year period (1887-90) St. John's, Riverside, and St. Paul's Morrisburg, have been united to form the St. Lawrence Parish.

For some years services had been held at the eighth concession (Dunbar) being conducted by the pastor of St. Peter's, North Williamsburg. On July 30, 1879, the new St. Luke's Lutheran church at Dunbar was dedicated. St. Peter's and St. Luke's form the Williamsburg Parish.

Of the succeeding pastors of the two Lutheran Parishes in Dundas county, mention might be made of the following: The Rev. M. H. Fishburn served a total of fourteen years, six years (1876-82) as pastor of the St. Lawrence Parish, and eight years (1882-1890) as pastor of the Williamsburg Parish. Rev. J. C. F. Rupp, in charge of the St. Lawrence Parish (1900-1908) proved to be an energetic missionary. On February 8, 1903, he held the first English service in Montreal; and a church was organized in that city the following year. In May of 1906 Pastor Rupp visited Toronto, and conducted English Lutheran services, which bore fruit to the extent that he was able to organize in that city on October 7, St. Paul's Lutheran Church. During the pastorate of Rev. Rupp, in August, 1902, St. John's received \$10,000 and St. Paul's \$4,000 from the Geo. Cook Estate. The Rev. J. Maurer, D. D., for many years president of the Central Canada Synod, served the Williamsburg Parish for eight years (1905-08) (1915-18) and left a salutary influence.

There are at present in Dundas county four Lutheran churches, three parsonages, two parish halls.