

The Legacy of Hopefield Mennonite Church

Presented by Glen R Goering, October 26, 2017

Swiss Mennonite Cultural Historical Association Banquet

By the fall of 1873, because of political and governmental change, plans were made by the Kotosufka Mennonite congregation of Russia to migrate to the plains of Kansas. Upon their arrival in 1874, the name Hoffnungsfeld or "Hopefield" was chosen for the newly settled congregation.

The first winter, the immigrant house, a structure 20 by 120 feet, which was built by the Atchinson, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad, was to serve as a residence and a place of worship. In the following eight years, the immigrant house became the congregation's community and education center as well as their place of worship. The new church building was completed in 1882, located just east of the then existing immigrant house.

Something to note, none of the wood from the immigrant house was used in the church's construction. There are however, early accounts of a used lumber sale. It is an interesting thought, that some of our area buildings could have been built with lumber salvaged from the old immigrant house.

The new church building served the Hopefield congregation through the first century and into the next. Most of the original building, although modified for modern use, can still be seen today.

Through the years, many remodeling projects were undertaken and are too numerous to list tonight. But, some major improvements include:

1. In 1904, a heater was installed in the small room and another in the main church.
2. In 1913, 200 trees were purchased and planted. The walls and ceilings were covered in decorative tin and a floor furnace was installed.
3. In 1935, electric lights were added
4. It was resolved in 1941 to build a basement.
This basement was dug and poured, just South of the original building site. When completed, the building was simply moved over onto the waiting basement. (my dad mentioned on occasion helping with this project as a teenager. I can just imagine my dad and uncle Forrey working together with shovels.....)
5. In 1946, a cornerstone was placed in the Northwest corner of the structure. The inscription reads "Hoffnungsfeld Church 1882"
6. In 1952, another interior remodel was performed. The now old tin ceiling and wall coverings were removed and replaced with ceiling board and the front of the church was also modified.
7. Foam padding for the pews and new carpeting were added in 1973. At this time, my favorite improvement was also added, much needed central air conditioning.

For over a century, Hopefield has been a place of worship, Christian education and fellowship. The Anabaptist ideology taught here has served well in the foreign mission fields and in local service. Hopefield, being the first Swiss Volhynian Mennonite church in Kansas has been called the Mother church, with descendent congregations at Christian, Burns, McPherson, Pretty Prairie, Kingman, and here at Eden. This truly historic church's legacy is celebrated with the Swiss Mennonite Cultural Historical Association's custody of the Hopefield cemetery, the 1943 Marker and the Centennial Monument. This, for all future generations to see and appreciate.

We mourn that the current Hopefield congregation no longer considers themselves part of the Swiss Mennonite tradition. But, we can take great comfort that the Hopefield legacy lives on in the number of descendent congregations that have been fostered, and the great number of us who have found our own faith by the

teachings and witness of the congregation of Hopefield Mennonite Church.