

HASLSTEAD FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH

January 5, 1874, twenty-five men from a group that had come to Summerfield, Il earlier, came to Halstead to purchase land from the Santa Fe Railroad. Shortly after the land was purchased, the first settlers began to arrive, early in 1874. In the spring of 1875 another group from Summerfield arrived.

Now there was a sufficient number of Mennonites in the Halstead area to consider organizing a church. Besides those around Halstead, a number had purchased land 8 to 13 miles north of Halstead where it was cheaper because it was further from the railroad.

Christian Krehbiel was one of the prominent men in establishing an organized Congregation of Mennonites in Halstead, Kansas. On March 15, 1875, he came to Halstead to bring help for the Russian Immigrants at Florence, Kansas, and help make arrangements for the spiritual nurture of the group of Summerfield people who had settled in the Halstead area.

Krehbiel preached his first sermon for the Summerfield people in Halstead on January 11, 1874. On Palm Sunday, March 21, 1875 he preached his second sermon here. At the close of the service, he invited the people to congregate for a discussion concerning the "church to be." Because of the concern expressed by the body of Mennonites, Krehbiel offered to help in the organizing of a congregation. Those present accepted that and the same day a church constitution was drafted with the help of David Goerz.

On Good Friday, March 26, 1875, the people gathered for a morning service. Following the service they examined and discussed the constitution and after making a few changes and additions the articles for the congregation's existence was unanimously accepted. At this service they agreed to meet on Easter Sunday, March 28, 1875 for worship and elect a minister and three deacons. The service of Holy communion was also to be observed. For their devotional hour that morning, they met in the Jacob Dettweiler Hotel on Halstead Main Street. They unanimously elected Valentine Krehbiel for their minister. After a fellowship meal at noon, John Haury, John W Ruth and Daniel Bachmann were chosen for deacons and installed in their office. At this service, 28 charter members were present.

Now that the congregation was organized, there was the question as to where to meet. The charter membership included those who had settled a considerable distance north of Halstead. This was a problem as transportation was by oxcart and wagon and team.

The group in the northern settlement met at the "Garden Valley" Schoolhouse, eight miles north of Halstead and the south group met in the Halstead schoolhouse. Since American friends also held their services in these schoolhouses, the Mennonites held their services in the afternoon. As the congregation was one body, they decided to hold services two Sundays in Halstead and every third Sunday at the Garden Valley school. Valentine Krehbiel served as minister for both groups.

Membership grew rapidly and soon the school buildings were inadequate. The group farther north dedicated their first wood frame building on March 4, 1877, which later became known as First Mennonite Church of Christian.

As both groups grew, activity began to center where each group met. At the March, 1877 business meeting it was decided that both the "north" and "south" group elect their own deacons

As the Halstead group needed more space, the north and south group gave money and supplied workers, with the help of some American friends to build a building used as both school and church until 1885.

Both groups met every Sunday which was too much for one minister, Valentine Krehbiel, so David Goerz was elected as assistant minister in January, 1878.

At the annual meeting on March 26, 1878, saw the dissolution of the "one" congregation into two component parts. First Mennonite Church of Halstead and First Mennonite Church of Christian began functioning separately but as "sister" congregations. A farewell service was held on April 21, 1878, and Holy Communion was observed.

The First Mennonite Church of Halstead has never been one of the larger bodies in the Western District Conference or in the General Conference of Mennonite Church. However, it has been the seedbed for numerous other congregations: West Zion of Moundridge, Garden Township of Hesston, Bethel College of North Newton, Burrton Mennonite of Burrton, and Geary Mennonite of Geary, Oklahoma.

The basic structure of this facility was erected in 1885. It was renovated in 1927 and 1952, and education wing added in 1964 and another renovation is being done at the present time.

*The Constitution began with Jesus' words to His Disciples "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:22) This became a permanent scripture text for our congregation. So much, that when John Gaeddert was our minister, he carved this verse on a plaque that hangs in the front of our sanctuary.

135th anniversary