



IN 1875, THIS AREA WAS DEDICATED AS A BURIAL SITE FOR SWISS MENNONITES WHO IMMIGRATED TO DAKOTA TERRITORY FROM RUSSIA STARTING IN 1874. ON APRIL 2, 1889, A HUGE PRAIRIE FIRE DESTROYED THE WOODEN MARKERS THAT IDENTIFIED THE GRAVES. MORE PRAIRIE FIRES IN THE FOLLOWING DECADE DESTROYED NEW AND REPLACEMENT WOODEN MARKERS. AS A RESULT, AT LEAST 95 GRAVES IN THIS AREA HAVE REMAINED UNMARKED. THIS MEMORIAL HONORS THOSE EARLY PIONEERS WHO FOUND THEIR FINAL REST HERE, INCLUDING THOSE WHO REMAIN UNKNOWN.

ALBRECHT, ANNA GRABER	1867-1886	KAUFMAN, ERNEST	1890-1891
ALBRECHT, FRANCES	1890-1892	KAUFMAN, FANNY	1885-1891
ALBRECHT, HENRY	1892-1892	KAUFMAN, JACOB	1848-1876
ALBRECHT, JACOB	1815-1877	KAUFMAN, JACOB	1877-1879
ALBRECHT, JACOB	1876-1876	KAUFMAN, JACOB	1900-1900
ALBRECHT, JOSEPH	1900-1900	KAUFMAN, JOHANN	1822-1878
ALBRECHT, LEON	1886-1887	KAUFMAN, JOHN	1877-1877
FLIGINGER, CHRISTINA KNODEL	1880-1903	KAUFMAN, LENA	1892-1892
FLIGINGER, JACOB INFANT	1876-1876	KAUFMAN, MARIA	1877-1877
GERING, DANIEL INFANT	1876-1876	KAUFMAN, MARY	1877-1877
GERING, FRED GRABER	1838-1875	KAUFMAN, PETER REV	1815-1884
GERING, FRED SCHRAG	1820-1880	KAUFMAN, PETER	1793-1881
GERING, JACOB	1803-1875	ORTMAN, ELIZABETH GRABER	1856-1885
GERING, JOHANN	1804-1878	PREHEIM, ALBERT	1892-1892
GERING, JOSEPH	1816-1880	PREHEIM, ANNA SCHRAG	1847-1878
GERING, SUSANNA KREHBIEL	1827-1878	PREHEIM, CAROLINA	1892-1892
GOERTZ, HENRY	1815-1879	PREHEIM, ELIZABETH	1857-1875
GRABER, ANNA	1887-1890	PREHEIM, ELIZABETH	1879-1886
GRABER, ANNA	1892-1892	PREHEIM, HELENA	1892-1892
GRABER, BENJAMIN	1889-1889	PREHEIM, HELENA	1894-1894
GRABER, CARL	1901-1901	PREHEIM, JACOB	1892-1892
GRABER, CHRISTINA STRAUSS	1819-1891	PREHEIM, JONATHAN	1880-1887
GRABER, DANIEL J	1846-1880	PREHEIM, TOBIAS	1884-1887
GRABER, EDWARD	1902-1902	RIES, ANDREW	1890-1903
GRABER, ELIZABETH KAUFMAN	1850-1886	RIES, CAROL TESMER	1829-1900
GRABER, ELIZABETH SCHRAG	1818-1881	RIES, FRED GRABER	1846-1876
GRABER, EMILIA	1875-1875	RIES, JACOB	1801-1892
GRABER, FRED PREHEIM	1851-1881	SCHRAG, EDWARD	1901-1901
GRABER, FRED WALTNER (SPITZ)	1850-1879	SCHRAG, FRED GRABER	1844-1876
GRABER, HENRY	1893-1893	SCHRAG, JONATHAN	1888-1892
GRABER, JACOB	1874-1875	SCHRAG, JONATHAN	1897-1897
GRABER, JACOB	1899-1899	SCHRAG, JOSEPH	1816-1875
GRABER, JACOB	1903-1903	SCHRAG, KATHERINE GERING	1853-1880
GRABER, JACOB J (SCHENKER)	1845-1885	SCHWARTZ, ELIZABETH SENNER	1847-1893
GRABER, JOHANN C	1818-1882	SCHWARTZ, KATHERINA SUTTER	1822-1882
GRABER, JOHANN SR (SPITZ)	1821-1875	SENNER, FREDRICKA HEITINGER	1817-1895
GRABER, JOHN	1883-1883	SENNER, WILLHELM	1815-1893
GRABER, JOHN	1883-1887	STUCKY, HENRY	1896-1898
GRABER, JOHN	1892-1892	STUCKY, JACOB	1824-1876
GRABER, JOSEPH	1882-1882	STUCKY, MARIA GRABER	1859-1891
GRABER, JOSEPH JOS	1852-1884	WALTNER, ANNA KAUFMAN	1859-1887
GRABER, LENA	1890-1891	WALTNER, ANNA PREHEIM	1840-1875
GRABER, LENA	1900-1900	WALTNER, JULIUS	1883-1886
GRABER, LYDIA	1898-1899	WALTNER, MARY	1864-1888
GRABER, MARY	1888-1888	WALTNER, MARY	1887-1887
GRABER, PETER	1876-1876	WALTNER, PETER	1884-1884
GRABER, PETER	1881-1881	WALTNER, PETER	1887-1887
GRABER, PETER	1885-1887		

DU, ABER, HERR, BLEIBST EWIGLICH UND DEIN GEDAECHTNIS FUER UND FUER. PSALMS 102:12  
BUT THOU, OH LORD, SHALT ENDURE FOREVER; AND THY REMEMBRANCE UNTO ALL GENERATIONS.



## Swiss Mennonite Memorial Marker

Section 1 in the Salem-Zion Mennonite cemetery contains 95 graves of known persons who died and were buried there starting in 1875. (Johann Graber Sr. (Spitz) was the first to be buried in this cemetery). A listing of these Swiss Mennonites is recorded in the Salem-Zion cemetery records but no specific burial locations given other than Section 1 and the eastern part of Section 2. Other persons, including non-Mennonites, from within the community were also buried here but their names were not recorded in the Mennonite Cemetery records.

During the years of 1875 through 1908, the South and North churches were one church and most Swiss burials were in this cemetery. Grave markers in those days were crosses made of wood with the names written or carved on them. In 1889 and other years thereafter, prairie fires swept through this area burning off the wooden crosses.

In recent years an interest emerged in a project to remember these pioneers who came before us and who are buried in Salem-Zion Cemetery but have no identification in the cemetery. A granite memorial marker listing those persons has been selected. At the top of the memorial is a cross which indicates the pioneer's faith in Jesus Christ and also a dove indicating our Mennonite peace position. Psalms 102:12 has been selected to be placed on the base in both German and English.

This memorial marker has received approval from the Salem-Zion Administrative Board to be placed in the cemetery in 2013. Approval to utilize the Salem-Zion Household Treasury as the donation recipient and expense payee has also been granted. Cost projections for the memorial are approximately \$7000.00 with ½ of that price due to the memorial company by December 31, 2012, in order to eliminate the price increase for 2013. Funding will be through donations received from within the Swiss communities of North and South Church, descendants of those who are being remembered, and anyone interested in preserving our pioneer Mennonite history. Donations are being solicited and may be given or sent to the Salem-Zion Household Treasurer, 27844-443<sup>rd</sup> Ave. Freeman SD 57029 and earmarked for "Swiss Memorial".

We encourage everyone to research the listing of names on this memorial using your family records for authenticity of names and dates. Any corrections may be shared with Duane and Marlys Graber Tieszen.

Posted: Tuesday, October 1, 2013 10:00 pm

by Tim L. Waltner



With a southern prairie wind rustling the leaves of the adjacent cornfield as a backdrop, about 100 people gathered Sunday afternoon, Sept. 29, on the edge of a rural cemetery to honor and remember early pioneer immigrants laid to rest there more than a century ago.

The setting was the Salem-Zion Mennonite (North) Church Cemetery in Rosefield Township in Turner County four miles directly east of Freeman. The occasion was the dedication of a memorial stone that includes the names of 96 men, women and children who were buried in the earliest cemetery in the community. While the general area is known, the early wooden gravesite markers that identified their final resting place were casualties of prairie fires that were common in the early decades of the settlement.

The early cemetery was established in 1875, a year after the primary migration that brought hundreds of Germans from Russia to what was then Dakota Territory. Among that group were 74 families of Swiss German Mennonite descent who settled primarily in the area east of what is now the city of Freeman.

The need for a centralized burial site was important to the settlers. In fact, they established it five years before they built the church on the location of the Salem-Zion, which was the first church built in this community by the Swiss Mennonite immigrants. A sister congregation, Salem Mennonite (South) Church, was established 2 1/2 miles south in 1908.



4 years ago the Salem-Zion Administrative board asked me to assist our cemetery sexton who was having health problems. This gave us access to the cemetery records and we became aware of the 96 Swiss Mennonite burials recorded there and whose wooden markers were destroyed by prairie fires in Section 1 and 2. It did not seem right to Marlys and myself that these hard working pioneers did not have any recognition of their burials here. We began to feel that a remembrance monument of some kind would be appropriate.

The next summer during our cemetery cleaning of lichen off of tombstones, we mentioned the idea of erecting a monument to some of those present. It was well received so we began with plans for creating a memorial monument.

We asked 3 monument companies to provide us with ideas, drawings and pricing for such a project. Murphy Granite Carving Company was chosen with Allen Schrag as their sales representative. A bid was received for a foundation that would support the weight of the big memorial stone and which would also meet the requirements of Murphy Granite Carving. Several persons assisted us with the design of the monument. With this design in hand we attended a Salem-Zion Administrative Board meeting in November of 2012 to ask for their permission and support of a proposed memorial monument to be placed in the Salem-Zion Cemetery. This was enthusiastically approved. We also visited with the Salem Mennonite Church council and received their approval and support.

After 9 draft drawings, the memorial monument was finally ordered. This 5 foot wide by 7 foot 6 inch tall, 8 inch thick, 4 ton granite monument sets on an 8 inch base and a foundation that is 30 inches wide, 88 inches long, and 8 inches thick. Underneath the foundation are 2 18 inch wide post holes or pilings going down over 4 feet. This is all tied together with rebar and poured full of concrete with the top finished off. The monument is supported by 2 1 inch thick stainless steel rods that are drilled into the monument, through the base and into the foundation and pilings.

I want to recognize and thank Allen Schrag, sales representative for the Murphy Granite Carving Company, Marc Pankratz, of LPL construction for the foundation, and Marlys for the countless hours of researching and proof reading. Thank you also to LaNae Waltner, Tim Waltner, and Allen Schmidt for their valuable contributions, to Marlan Kaufman and the dedication planning committee and those who are participating in this dedication service today, and to the many others who have given encouragement and support for this project.

Marlys  
Duane  
Tieszen

We extend a heartfelt thank you to the many who have financially supported this project and to those who will yet be making contributions to this Swiss Mennonite Memorial Monument.

Marlys and I are profoundly grateful that this Swiss Memorial project is a reality today.

But thou Oh Lord, shalt endure forever; and Thy remembrance unto all generations.

Who is buried here?

There are 96 names of Swiss Mennonites listed on this new memorial. Our early church cemetery records also tell us that some non-Mennonites living in the area asked permission to use this cemetery as a burial place for their loved ones. This permission was granted. However, the names and dates of those persons were not recorded in the Swiss Mennonite church records, and so those persons and their numbers remain unknown today.

Some of us, having already searched through these names, have found ancestors listed here, giving personal connections and personal worth to this place and project. For me, my great-grandmother, Anna Schrag Preheim, is one of these persons, having died in 1878 at the age of 30. It is our sincere hope that in the future this monument will serve as a valuable resource to many others, as they, too, seek to make connections back to their own ancestry.

It is a sobering and sad realization that of the 96 names listed here, 57 are names of persons aged 18 and younger. Of these 57, 38 are infants having the same birth and death years, with 11 of these having been born to my great-grandparents, Jacob B. & Marie Graber, who saw only 4 of their 15 children live to adulthood. This is another testament to the hardships and difficulties of life for these early pioneers.



01-28-2013

SWISS MENNONITE MEMORIAL MARKER DEDICATION

Salem-Zion Mennonite Church Cemetery  
27844 443<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Freeman, South Dakota

Sunday, September 28, 2013

3:00 PM 28

Opening Remarks

We have gathered to “raise up” and to dedicate this memorial stone. We have ample biblical precedent in doing so. Throughout Israel’s history, the people of Israel were called and invited to establish cairns or erect stones to memorialize events in their sacred history. Perhaps the most common and most striking of these stories memorializes the miraculous crossing of the people of Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land, recorded in Joshua 4. In this account, one representative from each of the twelve tribes is charged to pick up a large rock from the middle of the Jordan River as the people crossed over the backed-up river bed. These twelve stones are then set up in a cairn at Gilgal. Joshua then gives this instruction: “When your children ask their parents in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground’” (Joshua 4:21-22). The memorial becomes an instrument in teaching succeeding generations about God’s faithfulness in the events of the past.

This Swiss Mennonite Memorial marker signifies for us God’s faithfulness to our forebears in the most difficult first years of their lives in this land, before any of the infrastructure we take so much for granted in our communal life was established, and when blizzards and floods and fires and drought and grasshopper plagues marked their struggle to survive in this land. The marker signifies our gratitude for these brave and courageous pioneers who by faith came to this land to make a new life for themselves, their families and their church congregation. For yes, they came here in large measure as informal “congregations,” villages

who in the Ukraine had lived and worshipped together. And this marker signifies the tremendous personal cost these pioneers paid in those first years, particularly in the loss of their children, who one after another succumbed to the hazards of life here while only the hardy survived.

One of the most remarkable stone markers in scripture is the stone erected by Samuel in 1 Samuel 7:12, after the Ark of the Covenant that had been captured in battle by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4 had been returned to Israel by the Philistines, who had grown weary of the plagues they were experiencing because of the capture of this sacred object. So Samuel erects this stone near Mizpah, calling it "Ebenezer." It is the stone we sing about in hymns like "Come Thou Fount." "Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I'm come." Of course many a child, and truth be told, many of us as adults, have wondered what in the world it means to raise an Ebenezer, and the matter is only complicated when the word becomes a proper name for the Scrooge in Charles Dickens classic story, "A Christmas Carol." Why in the world would we want to raise Ebenezer Scrooge? But in Hebrew the word simply means "Stone of Help," so Samuel says in erecting the stone, "Hitherto, or thus far, or up until here, has the Lord helped us." And this too is what we mean to say when we dedicate this stone in memory of our pioneer forebears. "So far has the Lord helped us."

And of course, we are also sheltered or hidden in the rock, as our hymns testify. The men just sang about "sweetly resting in the cleft once made for me," "the rifted Rock in which we are sheltered." And in "A wonderful Savior is Jesus," we sing, "He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock." The wooden crosses that first marked the resting places of these pioneers succumbed to the ravages of weather and natural disaster, but the names inscribed on this rock will be legible

for generations to come. These pioneer men, women, and children are “sweetly resting in the cleft of the rock.” This is our faith as we dedicate this “Stone of Help,” this “Ebenezer.”

As you came, you were invited to pick up and hold a small stone, and if you did not take one then, there is a basket of stones here. After the prayer of dedication, you are invited to bring your stone, or to pick one up here, and then place it in the basket by the memorial marker.

Though you don't have to say anything, if you wish, you can say the name of an ancestor or a relative who is buried here and who is named on this marker. Or perhaps you want to place your stone in memory of others who are buried here. That small action will constitute the closing of our service, as we will disperse after all of us have had a chance to place a stone by this marker, allowing each of us to tangible share in this dedication.

Would you pray with me? I will close each petition with the words, “With gratitude,” and invite you to say with me, “We give thanks to you, O God.”

#### Dedication Prayer

For these spiritual and physical ancestors of ours, whose names are inscribed on this memorial stone, and who braved a harsh and unbroken prairie as pioneers to establish the community in which we live today, with gratitude,

**We give thanks to you, O God.**

For all these little children named on this marker, and others unnamed and yet known to you, all of them remembered and embraced whole and complete in your bosom, with gratitude,

**We give thanks to you, O God.**

For this memorial marker we now dedicate to God's glory which enables us to teach our children about the sacrifices of those who have gone before us and about God's faithfulness, with gratitude,



**We give thanks to you, O God.**

And most of all, for you, our faithful God, who at every turning of life has been our refuge and our "Stone of Help", and who is always the one who, thus far, has helped us, with gratitude,

**We give thanks to you, O God.**

And now may God bless us and keep us, may the very face of God shine upon us and be gracious to us, may God's face turn toward us, and grant us God's peace. Amen.

You may now come forward and place a memorial stone in front of this memorial marker, and then you are dismissed.

S. Roy Kaufman  
Freeman, South Dakota  
September 28, 2013.

## Swiss Mennonite Memorial

### Marker Dedication

3:00 p.m. September 29, 2013

Salem-Zion Mennonite Cemetery

27844 443<sup>rd</sup> Ave, Freeman, South Dakota

Opening and Welcome .....Rev. Eric Deckert  
An Initiative to Remember..... Duane Tieszen  
Who is buried here? .....Marlys Tieszen  
*Soul Sounds From a Grassy Knoll* ..... Berneda Koller  
*"Children of the Heavenly Father"* .....East Freeman Men's Ensemble  
Historical Facts and Themes .....LaNae Waltner  
*"In the Rifted Rock I'm Resting"* .....East Freeman Men's Ensemble  
Dedication and Closing Prayer..... Rev. S. Roy Kaufman  
Placement of rocks at the base of the memorial

Speech by LaNae Waltner

September 29, 2013

This is the place where many tears have been shed, but today, let's rejoice, remembering the lives of our loved ones. This is South Dakota's oldest Mennonite Cemetery. There was a Graber buried on this homestead in 1875. In 1878, four years after our ancestors came here, a plot was started for burial. In the early years, neighboring churches made use of this cemetery. There are at least four denominations represented here. Four years before a plot was staked, pioneers buried family members on their homesteads. They were later <sup>sent</sup> transferred to this church plot with the exception of 16 or 17 buried at the Alfred Schmidt farm which are still there. Katherina Graber, caught in a prairie fire along the Vermillion River, in late 1874 is buried along the river.

People buried on the Karl Ries Homestead were moved here after 1878. The 1878 Vermillion flood victims are buried along the Vermillion River.

Peter Graber donated the acreage and the deed for the church in 1885. Peter Graber, later moved to Kansas and sold the land to Jacob J. Graber who sold 154 ½ acres to Salem-Zion for \$800.00 in 1887. Land not needed by the church was sold again.

The first years, all of our Swiss Mennonite ministers were buried at Salem-Zion with the exception of the Rev. Christian Mueller. There are 200 immigrants buried here.

Day and night, our people were worried about prairie fires. There were many fires. The biggest one was in 1889. J.D. Graber was 10 years old and smelled smoke while herding cattle. Then he saw a cloud of smoke in the north-west. He ran to tell his father. They quickly herded the cattle back and his father frantically plowed three furrows around the farm. Soon, flames shot up 15-20 feet. The fire burned the tall grass in the slough to water level. Graber said he never forgot the loud roaring sound of the fire. The buildings were saved by the fire break and the slough. We don't know how many farms were damaged. That big fire from the north-west caused damage in Marion. It crossed our cemetery and damaged Hurley and the bluffs of Turkey Ridge.

Notice the many small tombstones. Many have a lamb engraved. It was difficult for the pioneers to contact doctors during illness, which necessitated creating home remedies. Scarlet fever was deadly. Within a few days, Joseph Schrag lost three children to scarlet fever. It was during a snowstorm, so they weren't buried for a week. The bodies were brought by a horse-drawn spring wagon. Later platform buggies were used. The first caskets were made of wood by our local Swiss carpenters. Grave digging was done by friends and relatives of the deceased.

In 1905 a shack was put in the south-west corner for digging tools. There was also a stove and chairs for women and children to take refuge during severe cold during the cemetery service.

In the 1930's, undertakers took over for a fee, however, family members could still be in charge.

Land from the north road to the north fence was acquired in the early 1940's.

A cemetery committee was established in 1946 to clean the plot and provide a systematic plan for burial.

The source for records were with the Turner County Register of Deeds and emigrants who were well posted and the families who kept records.

We need to tell our stories. We want our children to connect to our heritage through this cemetery.

To understand the present, we need to know about our past.



Speech by Bernie Koller

September 29, 2013

### **Soul Sounds from a Grassy Knoll**

This is a Memorial Day Tribute to those missing or departed with no known resting place or to those where forces have eroded the marker that indicated the passing of a life. The following thoughts were inspired by the pioneers buried in the southeast corner of Salem-Zion Mennonite Cemetery near Freeman SD. Church records reveal names and dates, but the gently sloping mound itself shows nothing but thick prairie grass.

Here lie the loved and unloved, the lofty and low, the young and the old. In the eternal scheme of things, each life was as brief as a vapor kissing the sun to blossom with temporary color. So they rest together like an underground rainbow.

Some are dead of the flu, one of exhaustion, several by drowning, and yet another by his own hand. Here there are those extinguished by blizzards, floods and fires, diphtheria, and yes, even a broken heart. Some slip merely because too much time passed. Undisturbed they repose, ageless, speechless....their stories locked up like spiritual treasure.

But to the discriminating listener, the immutable bluff makes its soul sounds.

"Here, here I am." A Young One signals, "here, hear, hear."

Or was that the wind?

"We hear you, Child," replies a Mature One, "we hear you."

A palm against the soil feels the silent vibrations like a Helen Keller message. The wind whines in harmony with that Young Voice as it weeps.

"Oh, I am nameless here with no marker. Can anyone hear? Can anyone remember? How can anyone know?"

The duet ends in a zephyr breeze swishing against the grasses.

"Shush, shush, now Youngster, take some comfort in the warmth of the soil."

"But it is so.....so empty to be this unattended."

"Rely on the wisdom of your companions, Child. Your presence here is recorded in an earthly book. Some do not even have that. Your existence has a mark in the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Your Soul has a sound."

"But I have no gravestone."

"Look up then, and choose a star."

".....and I have no flowers.....no flowers."

The voice pouted as the wind puffed.

"There is the prairie grass." The grass shushed, shushed in a gust of warm wind.

"I know, but several times the grass burned and my wooden marker went with it."

"Yes, they are frail and perishable. But then, the grass renews itself again and again, like a quiet reminder."

"Well, where are some tears for me? I want to be remembered," breathy and wind-driven the Young Voice was insistent.

"The dew remembers with precious drops. A deluge of tears is yours with every rain."

It was calm. Then a sweet breeze ventured, "How came you to such peace?"

"Through a drop of grace."

"Seek within and find solace in the Lord's eternal gifts. Prayer to Him is the breath of your Soul, the sound of your Soul, Child. Rest your thoughts and faith in that of which we are all a part—earth, rain, wind....."

"Oh, I know the wind."

"Ah, you see, the wind has been your mourner all this time. What one could be more faithful? The breath of our collective souls has been in the sound of the wind. It is eternal and communicates with all elements."

"I hear it now. It seems different."

"The difference is in you. Every time the sun rises and sets, it is recorded in the Kingdom of Heaven, as it is with every sparrow that falls. Shush, shush, now."

*A voice says, "Cry!"*

*And I said, "What shall I cry?"*

*All flesh is grass,*

*And all its beauty is like the flower of the field.*

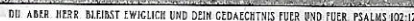
*The grass withers, the flower fades;*

*but the word of our God will stand forever.*

*Isaiah 40:6-8*



The Swiss Mennonite congregations of East Freeman, Salem-Zion and Salem Mennonite churches have joined to erect the marker. — *S. Roy Kaufman*





# Memorial planned for historic cemetery

by Tim L. Waltner

A project is underway to honor some of the earliest immigrants who arrived in this community in the 1870s. It calls for a memorial to more than 96 men, women and children who were buried in the earliest cemetery in the community but whose specific gravesite markers were casualties of prairie fires that were common in the early decades of the settlement.

The project has its roots in the Salem-Zion Mennonite (North) Church in Rosefield Township in Turner County four miles directly east of Freeman. The original cemetery is near the cemetery that continues to be used

continued on page 14: **Memorial**

## Memorial ■ Broader community invited to support effort continued from front page

by the congregation.

The early cemetery was established in 1875, a year after the primary migration that brought hundreds of Germans from Russia to what was then Dakota Territory. Among that group were 74 families of Swiss German Mennonite descent who settled primarily in the area east of what is now the city of Freeman.

The need for a centralized burial site was important to the settlers; in fact they established it five years before they built the church on the location of the Salem-Zion church, the first church built in this community by the Swiss Mennonite immigrants. A sister congregation, Salem Mennonite (South) Church was established two and one half miles south in 1908.

A history of the cemetery, written by Art Graber for *Looking Back*, a book written in 1980 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, notes that it is the oldest Swiss Mennonite cemetery in South Dakota.

"Many of the neighboring churches, made use of the

cemetery in the early years," he wrote. "At least four different congregations are represented.

"One of the biggest prairie fires swept across our cemetery in the year 1889, burning all the wooden markers," he wrote. "The markers were homemade from a piece of 2 x 12 with name and date engraved. Again in the early 1890s several prairie fires swept over the grounds destroying all the new and restored markers."

The cemetery has been improved and expanded over the years. But in recent years there has been a growing interest in erecting a formal memorial to those people buried there in those early decades, but whose graves remain unidentified.

That has led to an effort to erect a granite memorial marker to honor the 96 known men, women and children, along with an unknown number of others, who found their final rest there. It includes the names of those known to be buried there and also acknowledges the history, as well as those who remain unknown.

The project has moved forward with support from the

Salem-Zion and Salem congregations, but because the families represented there extend beyond those churches, an invitation to support the effort is being extended to the larger community.

Funding for the \$7,000 project is coming from donations received from within the Salem-Zion and Salem congregations, descendants of those who are being remembered and anyone interested in preserving this aspect of local history. Donations can be sent to the Salem-Zion Household Treasurer, 27844 443rd Ave., Freeman, SD 57029 and earmarked for "Swiss Memorial."

Duane and Marilyn Graber Tieszen, members of the Salem-Zion congregation, have helped lead the effort. Anyone wanting more information is encouraged to contact them by email at [duanar@gwtc.net](mailto:duanar@gwtc.net).

This is the marker proposed to be placed near the Salem-Zion Mennonite Church cemetery 4 miles east of Freeman.