



Our Times

Volume 2 Issue 1

THE PEOPLE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE OF LOGAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Spring 1997

God's People in Logan County

Logan County is a better place to live because of its community of believers: their testimony is evident in the brick and mortar of their buildings and the charity of their works. Each of the county's houses of worship took root within a small, closely-knit and ethnically-identifiable cluster of pioneer families. But over time, each congregation opened avenues of service and spiritual guidance to the broader community. Each congregation contributed to the character and education of its young people and sent them forth to merge with their counterparts from other congregations to form the county's leadership. This issue of *Our Times* features the stories of a handful of Logan County religious bodies, but each of the dozens of churches in the county has its own vivid story to tell; and the larger story is found in the way people with diverse religious perspectives have joined hands to build a stronger community.



St. Mary's Catholic Church fire in 1976.

Tempered by Fire

December 9, 1976, was a bitter cold day. Just ask Lincoln's Assistant Fire Chief Dallas Millard. He spent hours that morning battling the fire at St. Mary's Catholic Church.

"There was an inch of ice on everything," recalls Millard. "Our coats were covered with ice. So was all the equipment. If you didn't use a hose for a while, it froze to the ground."

The firemen had been called out to the 97-year-old building at 2:08 a.m. By the time the fire was out, the entire church had been gutted. While the skeleton of the church remained, the brick was old and soft and deemed not worth saving. The long tradition of two Catholic parishes in Lincoln was about to come to an end.

The first Catholic church in Lincoln had been built in 1857. By 1867, the congregation had grown quite large and included many German people who wanted to hear the homily (sermon) in their own language.

So it was that two Catholic parishes were created in Lincoln: the German Catholic Church (St. Mary's) for German-speaking Catholics, and St. Patrick's Church (also known as the Irish church) for those who spoke English. Before long, each parish had its own parochial school.

Over a century of separation came to an end after the fire in 1976. At first, the parishioners of St. Mary's attended staggered services at St. Pat's. Eventually an advisory committee suggested that the two parishes be combined and given a new name.

Oddly enough, an earlier fire in another city was instrumental in making the transition easier, by leading to the consolidation of the

(Continued on page 2, Catholic ...)

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Publisher's Notes

A year ago I returned to the Baptist church of my boyhood for my brother's funeral. A fog rose eerily from the January thaw to envelop the church in silver mist. Inside, the preacher, dressed in an olive-green suit, stood at the pulpit in front of the baptismal well where my brother had once been immersed. We sang "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "Amazing Grace," and my cousin from Tennessee read a collection of memories. Then my sons, my nephews, and my uncle bore the casket down the aisle, out the door, and through the parted mourners; the mist that shrouded them could have risen from the moors of Britain. When I married a Lutheran, I became a Lutheran. We call our minister

"pastor" instead of "brother," and he wears vestments instead of olive-green suits. We sprinkle our babies instead of dunking our teenagers. No one in my wife's family had married a non-Lutheran for as many generations as we could trace back from Illinois farms to Germany. And while my own family was more fickle in its allegiance, our range of options had been limited to Baptist, Methodist, and Christian.

For most of my life I thought the differences between churches were found in their positions on doctrinal matters. I know now that differences between churches are as much a consequence of the life experiences of their members—over generations, across oceans, and through wildernesses—as they are disagreements over the interpretation of scripture.

My daughter has married a Roman Catholic, and my grandchildren are being raised in the church of their Polish and Italian ancestors. We once could guess a person's church affiliation by the sound of their last name. That is not so true today, in Logan County or anywhere else. But the community that each church provides its members is tinted by the history of the people who carried it to this time and place. The richness and beauty of American culture rests on the singular notion that in a free country our religious preferences are not barriers to the living out of our lives together. **SR**

(Continued from page 1, *Catholic...*)

two Catholic schools. After the tragedy at the Our Lady of the Angels parochial school in Chicago in 1958, the parents, nuns, and priests in Lincoln became alarmed. St. Pat's and St. Mary's were old schools, and the thought of a fire at either one was terrifying. The children of both parishes deserved a new, safe school.

By that time, language was no longer an issue. In addition, as Monsignor Norman Goodman, pastor of Holy Family Church, explains, "love doesn't know those boundaries"; so intermarriage had blurred the distinctions between the parishes.

All things considered, Father Daniel Monaghan (St. Pat's) and Monsignor Leo Henkel (St. Mary's) agreed it was time to build a new school; and Carroll Catholic opened on September 11, 1961.

There were some apprehensions. "We were really anxious when we found out they were going to combine the two schools," says Susan Dougherty Cosgrove, who attended St. Pat's. "We didn't talk to the kids from St. Mary's. If we saw them on their playground across the street from our school, we just stared."

Janet Ruenzi Langenbahn attended all eight grades at St. Mary's. She would never have guessed that some of her closest friends in high school and college would be graduates of St. Pat's. Although her husband Jerry remembers that the schools "were friendly rivals," the rivalry was real, with closing times staggered so as to avoid trouble.

According to Susan Cosgrove, however, the nuns made the transition easy. "They told us how lucky we were to have a new school and how safe it would be. There was an outside door to every stairway; in case of fire, we would never have to jump out of the windows," as had happened in the Our Lady of the Angels fire. Pep talks from Father Monaghan created an air of excitement; so when the two groups of children were combined, "we all liked each other, and got along just fine," remembers Susan.

So by the time St. Mary's burned, children from the two parishes had been going to school together for 15 years. They made the transition much more easily than some of the older people, a few of whom refused at first to go to mass at St. Pat's. Eventually, however, according to Jenny Webster Higgins, a former organist at St. Mary's, "they melted and came back."

The name Holy Family was chosen for the new parish; and the two parishes combined under the joint pastorate of the Reverend Norman Goodman and the Reverend Edward Westermann on March 17, 1978.

A Star of David in Lincoln

Temple Beth-El

Picture yourself arriving at the Woman's Club building in Lincoln for a meeting. You find the lovely brick building with stone trimmings at the corner of McLean and Delavan Streets, hurry up the front walk, and glance at the front of the building to see—a star of David? What does this have to do with the Woman's Club?

Fact is, this little building was built as a Jewish temple, which also explains the stained glass window over the front door. Temple Beth-El was dedicated on Sunday, November 6, 1910, at 2:00 p.m. with a ceremony that included the lighting of the perpetual lamp, several readings from the Holy Scriptures, choir music, a violin solo by Prof. Herbert O. Merry, and the depositing of the sacred scrolls. The key to the temple was presented to the president of Temple Beth-El, Mr. Lewis Rosenthal, by Helene Landauer. Rabbi Charles S. Levi from Peoria, who had organized the congregation in 1904, gave the oration; Rabbi Abraham J. Messing, the congregation's rabbi, also spoke. A representative from the Ministerial Association and the mayor of Lincoln, W. D. Gayle, were present.

The architect of the building was J.M. Deal; and the interior of the building was done by Shanbacher, a Springfield artist who decorated most of the religious buildings in Lincoln at that time. According to the *Lincoln Times-Courier*, the six memorial windows on the sides of the building gave the temple "a beautiful effect when in evening the lights [were] turned on" (November 8, 1910). The \$7,000 cost of the temple was paid for by a congregation of only 20 members.

Jane Landauer remembers that her sisters went to Sunday School at the temple. In 1915, before Jane was born, her sister Virginia and her cousins Helene and Norman Landauer took part with the other Sunday School children in the "Lighting of the Lights" at the commemoration of the Hanukkah Feast.

Lincoln had a small but active Jewish community, and articles about programs at Temple Beth-El appeared in the *Courier* regularly. However, the congregation was never large enough to support a full-time rabbi; and in 1927, the temple was sold to the Lincoln Woman's Club. The building was remodeled and has been the home of the Woman's Club ever since.



Lincoln Woman's Club, formerly the Temple Beth-El.

"But whatever happened to the stained glass windows?" you ask. All but the one in front were sold along with the pews, pulpit desk, and chairs to the trustees of Cornland Methodist Church, who were replacing the building destroyed by a tornado on April 19, 1927. The Masons bought the Cornland Methodist Church building in 1956; when it was later sold and made into a home, most of the windows were sold as well.

Material for this issue came from *A Father's Mantle* by William G. Chrystal; *Reinhold Niebuhr* by Richard Fox; "Church stands tall as 'light-house,'" by Sam Redding, *Logan Today*, Nov. 30, 1983; *Eminence A Steeple Above the Prairie* by Lynn Hieronymus; *History of Logan County Illinois 1982*; church directories, the *Lincoln Courier* under its various names; and all the terrific memories of our terrific friends.

Looking Back

To 1915

Easter—and the workers at Gullet Greenhouses had been as busy as the Easter bunny—shipping the lilies from ten thousand bulbs to florists as far away as Mobile and Galveston. The *Lincoln Courier-Herald* had reported that sheer fabrics were the material of choice for Easter gowns, and local milliners had been turning out Easter bonnets. Landauer's had encouraged *Courier-Herald* readers to purchase a suit that's "all the go."

On Holy Thursday, high masses were sung at St. Mary's and St. Pat's Catholic Churches. Gruendonnerstag services were held at the Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel church; the Rev. John Barthel, pastor of the German Evangelical Lutheran Zion church, conducted special morning services.

A religious census of the city of Lincoln done that summer found that Catholics had the greatest representation, with 266 families; members of the Christian church second (206); and Methodists third (194). In all, nineteen different Christian denominations were represented, in addition to the Jewish members of Temple Beth-El. Not bad, although the census takers were saddened by the 160 families found to be unchurched or unwilling to even answer questions about their religious affiliation.

The census was taken in preparation for the Wheeler Evangelistic Campaign to be held in September. The campaign began with evening prayer meetings held twice a week in fifty-two homes for two weeks before the revival. A tabernacle was built, and hundreds of people showed up for the meetings. On "Church Night," seven congregations attended in force, six of the them assembling at their churches and marching in a group to the tabernacle, singing all the way. Dr. Wheeler's sermons were printed in the *Courier-Herald*, and 3,500 people heard the evangelist preach on the practical application of the Ten Commandments.

A New Church Every 82 Years

Second Baptist gets a new home

Nineteen hundred fifteen was a pretty exciting year for Second Baptist Church, what with the new building program and all. Nineteen ninety-seven is a pretty exciting year for the same reason.

Second Baptist is one of Lincoln's two black churches (black is the term favored by Second Baptist's pastor, the Rev. Glenn Shelton). The church was founded in 1874 by ten Christians who met in each other's homes for the first two years. In 1876, on a lot donated by Mr. and

(Sunday) There will be a meeting for cement blocks. Come and subscribe," reads an announcement in the June 19, 1915, *Courier-Herald*. The cornerstone was laid on October 31st, and the congregation got to work building the church at 829 Broadway.

The new building was dedicated with a four-day celebration beginning Sunday, August 27, 1916. The services were ecumenical affairs, with preaching by pastors of the Methodist, First Cumberland Presbyterian, A.M.E., and Christian churches. After the Sunday morning service, at which Pastor Fields preached, dinner was served in the basement of the new church. At the 2:30 dedication, Rev. J.A. Crockett D.D. of Decatur preached; and Dr. J.A. Lucas of the I.O.O.F. (Odd Fellows Home) conducted the subscription raising traditional in churches at that time.

Of the \$4,500 cost of the building, \$2,000 was left to raise when the afternoon began. By the time Dr. Lucas had finished his part in the ceremony, \$1,100 had been raised— \$276 in cash and \$800 in pledges.

Brother Shelton observes that, as in 1915, the work of building the new church at 1728 Tremont Street is being done by the congregation. "We're doing it ourselves," he comments. "It's taken us two years, but we're almost finished."

Shelton has also been gratified by the response from the community: from the many donations, to the pledge by the Promise Keepers to refinish the pews, to the bricklayer who is donating his talent.

Shelton talks like a believer—which he is. Although he was a lifelong church member, his life changed after he "asked the Lord to come into my life" at the age of 35. Having been told by his pastor that he was called to preach, he accepted the pastorate at Second Baptist in 1985.

Although the ages of the 111 members of the church range from 7 to 86, Second Baptist has a special interest in children. Sunday School teachers are encouraged to prepare the children for their baptisms so they do not emerge as "wet unbelievers." Pastor Shelton also loves to encourage the children to do well in school by giving them \$1.00 for each A on their report cards.

A strong sense of community knits all the members of Second Baptist together. Each deacon is responsible for six families—calling on them if they miss church and caring for their physical welfare. But then, Second Baptist has always been a caring church.



1915 dedication program.

Mrs. Thomas Jefferson, the little congregation built a small frame church, where they worshipped until the new cement block church was built in 1915.

On a typical Sunday in 1915, the Rev. P. W. Fields preached in the morning and in the evening. The Ladies' Missionary Society, Wednesday evening prayer meeting, ladies' sewing circle, choir rehearsal, Brotherhood's spelling match, gospel cake socials, and moonlight picnics all brought about a sense of community.

That same year, the congregation moved the frame church to the back of the lot and built their concrete block church in the front. "3:00 p.m.



Second Baptist Church congregants leave old church behind on way to new church.

An Immigrant Church Reaching Out

St. John United Church of Christ

God, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed;

Give us the courage to change what should be changed;

Give us the wisdom to distinguish one from the other.

Many Logan County residents are familiar with The Serenity Prayer. However, not everyone knows that it was written by Reinhold Niebuhr, arguably the outstanding American theologian of the 20th century, and a former member and briefly pastor of St. John United Church of Christ in Lincoln. The Niebuhr connection, however, is only part of the story of St. John's.

Saint John Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized in 1865 with twenty-nine members. By 1885, the German immigrants who made up the church had become prosperous enough to build a brick veneer church at the corner of Fifth and Union Streets. The bells in the massive tower called the faithful to worship and also tolled during the Lord's Prayer.

By the late 1800's, church members were well established in the community—and ready to build a hospital! Pastor Hermann Schmidt's wife Adelheid had been trained as a Christian deaconess in Germany and was shocked by the lack of trained nursing personnel in Lincoln. Her death in 1893 moved the congregation, who were also impressed by the two deaconesses who came to Lincoln from the Deaconess Home and Hospital in St. Louis during the typhoid epidemic of 1898.

Following a successful building campaign, kicked off by a mass meeting at the Broadway (later Grand) theatre to drum up community support, Evangelical St. John's Deaconess Home and Hospital was dedicated on January 19, 1902. That same year, the Rev. Gustav Niebuhr came to Lincoln to serve as pastor of St. John's and administrator of the hospital.

When Niebuhr died within a week of being diagnosed with diabetes on April 21, 1913, his son, Reinhold, hurried home from Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis to conduct the memorial services. Reinhold wasn't due to graduate from Eden until June, but the board allowed him to leave early so he could accept the call from St. John's to be its pastor until he left for Yale Divinity School in the fall.

Reinhold Niebuhr went on to a distinguished

career as a theologian, preacher, participant in the founding of the World Council of Churches, and dean of Union Theological Seminary in New York City. *Moral Man and Immoral Society* is one of his more famous books. Two other Niebuhr children, H. Richard and Hulda, were prominent in theology and religious education, respectively.



1904 confirmation class with Pastor Gustav Niebuhr.

The Evangelical Deaconess Hospital trained deaconesses until 1923, after which it opened a professional nursing school which operated until 1946. Membership on the hospital board of trustees was opened to community members in 1926, and Abraham Lincoln Memorial Hospital was chartered in 1948 to succeed the Deaconess Hospital.

Meanwhile, the members of St. John's had built a new church on the corner of Seventh and Maple Streets in 1925, adding a parsonage and Christian Education building in later years. Since 1957, St. John's has been part of the United Church of Christ. The present pastor is the Rev. Richard Reinwald.

Memories of St. John Members

The Rev. Elmer Hoefer, 94, a third-generation pastor and the son of the Rev. John A. Hoefer (pastor of St. John's from 1924-1946) remembers visiting his parents in the parsonage that had been built for the Niebuhrs in 1902 at the corner of Fifth and Union. On the way to Lincoln, he would stop in Detroit, where Reinhold was pastor of Bethel Church, to visit him and his mother.

Naomi Hauffe was organist at St. John's for 54 years. She remembers Reinhold Niebuhr's mother, Lydia, and her sister, Deaconess Sister Adele Hosto. Mrs. Hauffe's son Jim and his friend Mark Barth used to visit the two ladies on Saturday mornings. Sister Adele helped the little boys make a scenic bird sanctuary out of a man's hatbox.

Henry Gaydosh remembers World War I as a hard time for German churches. People turned against Immanuel Lutheran parochial school and "they had an awful time keeping the school from being torn down or the doors broken down." Perhaps such troubles explain why, between 1913 and 1920, St. John closed its parochial school, discontinued German in the Sunday School, and changed all the church literature to English. German services were still held in addition to the English services until 1939, however.

A Country Church with Deep Roots

Eminence Christian Church

Eminence Christian Church is the oldest church in the county that continues to meet for worship, having been planted in the prairie grass west of the present community of Atlanta in the spring of 1838.

The non-denominational congregation called their church Sugar Creek Church because of its location on the creek by Morgan's mill, a handy place for baptisms. In 1856 a new building was built about a mile east. Thirty-five prosperous years later, the congregation sold that building and built a more elaborate church with carpets, furnace, a baptistry, and a seating capacity of 600.

Imagine the horror of the community when their beloved church burned to the ground on March 18, 1901. Then imagine the dedication that led the members to subscribe over half of the cost of a new building before the fire was out. The present building was finished in January of 1902 and boasted an 800-pound bell in the steeple and a gasoline lighting plant that the *Atlanta Argus* teased might cause an explosion and premature ascension.

What began to be called Eminence Christian Church continued to thrive until the twenties, when the little congregation went for eight years without regular services. Finally in 1932, I.H. Beckholt offered his services as minister; and by the 1938 centennial the church was healthy again. Since 1944, every minister has been associated with Lincoln Christian College; the present pastor is Mark Sanders, a student at LCC. The longest pastorates have been those of Billy Chambers (1954-67) and Lynn Hieronymus (1973-1989).

Some members of the Eminence Christian Church are seven- and eighth-generation descendants of the charter members, and over the years their families have exhibited the hardy pioneer spirit of their ancestors. For example, until the new bathrooms and kitchen were built in 1967, the church had no running water. Members who had all the amenities at home made do at church with two outhouses at the end of the sidewalk, and Hazel Leesman toted the glass coffee cups home from potlucks in a galvanized dishpan to wash them.

The addition of vinyl siding in 1987-88 brought a challenge: how to work on the steeple without someone getting hurt. The solution was to use a crane to take it down; let the contractors, Mark and Harry Sherman, put the siding on; and then hoist it back atop the church.

The people of Eminence Christian Church are proud of their support of the youth, missionaries, and the Bartmann and Christian nursing homes.

Memories of Eminence Church

Marian and Jim Thompson were married in Eminence Church, which has been Jim's church all his life. Marian reminds us that dues for the Ladies Aid have been 10 cents

a month since the organization began in 1902 and that in the early days, a friendship quilt was made to raise money. Each member was to contribute 10 blocks with names on them, charging 10 cents for each name. The quilt hangs today in the Atlanta library.

Another early fund-raising effort was to bake a cake with a dime in it. Each slice of cake cost 10 cents, and whoever got the piece with the dime had to bring the cake the next time.

Marian also remembers the coal furnace, which the deacons and elders took turns caring for. The men would usually start the furnace at about 6:00 a.m., go home, and then come back at 9:00 for Sunday School. Usually the system worked, but sometimes the furnace would go out; other times the building would be full of smoke when the parishioners arrived.

Ruth Ann Hieronymus remembers her husband Lynn holding his grandchildren Staci and Joshua up to ring the bell. She also says it's a thrill to drive out into the country and see the parking lot full of cars—it's just like Easter Sunday these days. She finds it quite inspiring to see the steeple of the church "just above the prairie" and to know that her husband looked at it all his life. "It's a real blessing," she says.



Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door and see all the people.

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They Remember...

ELMER HOEFER REMEMBERS that the custom of the men sitting on one side of the church and the women on the other began because the women didn't want the men to see them nursing their babies.

JANE MIER REMEMBERS that Pastor Leon Appel from the Lincoln Christian Church was famous for his practical jokes. Once when he was preaching out-of-town, he arranged for a policeman to remove one of his friends from the service on a trumped-up traffic charge.

JIM AND NANCY IRELAND REMEMBER being the first couple married in the new Immanuel Lutheran Church, which was built almost entirely by the men and women of the congregation.

BILL GOSSETT REMEMBERS staying up all night to tend the hog on a spit during a fund-raiser for the new parish hall at Trinity Episcopal.

MARILYN WILLMERT REMEMBERS the Easter Sunday a pipe burst and the men of First Baptist cooked Easter breakfast in their waders.

JANE POERTNER REMEMBERS growing up in First Presbyterian Church. One summer she and her girl friends got permission from their mothers to attend each other's churches as long as they didn't neglect their own. So all summer they went as a group to Saturday night mass at St. Pat's, Sunday School at First Presbyterian, Sunday morning services at First Baptist, and Sunday evening services at the Christian Church.

MARY CADWALLADER REMEMBERS scavenger hunts, croquet, and sack races with the Home Builders Club at First United Methodist Church — and what a treat it was for young couples to get out once a month.

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