

## **Iva Lutheran School 1895-2004**

On the 17th of February 1895, the Lutherans of this vicinity held a meeting in the Iva public school house to consider if it might be advisable to organize a congregation at Iva. It was agreed to and a request was made to St. Peter Lutheran for a release and also for the Rev C. Friedrich Mueller, of St. Peter, to serve the newly organized congregation until Iva could get a pastor of their own. Request was granted by St. Peter and so began Iva Lutheran.

The first school, also used as the church, was built by members of the church by dragging logs from woods owned by John Tessin near Tittabawassee Road. Several men cut logs, and teams of horses pulled them across the section through the Stenzel farm (the farm across the road from the church) and over the creek to start the base of the school. Many pieces of lumber came from the Scharf farm also. The dedication of the Iva Church and School in 1895 was in the woods next to the school (where the teacherage stands today). It was potluck dinner with homemade ice cream. Edna Loesel remembers her grandmother telling of butchering a lamb so they could furnish sandwiches for the occasion.

From the very beginning this congregation realized the importance of Christian training and education for their youth, so even before the first pastor had arrived, they had engaged Prof. J. C. Winterstein to take charge of the school until their pastor would come. Pastor Mueller arrived and served as both pastor and teacher until the load became too heavy for one man to carry. In 1911 it was decided to call a teacher, Prof. E. Eichinger from the Teacher's Seminary in Addison, IL to take charge of the school. In 1913 Teacher Eichinger resigned and candidate Ernst Bickel was called and installed on August 31, 1913. Not only did Teacher Bickel serve as teacher but also as organist and choir director.

Many students stayed with members of the congregation during the school year so they could receive a Christian education. The Jacob family, who lived near the Jam Store on Homer Road in Midland County, drove the horse and buggy to school. The horse stayed in the teacher's garage and the buggy was housed in the pastor's shed until time to go home. At lunch time the oldest Jacob boy fed and watered the horse, with hay brought from home. It was nothing for a family to have eight or nine children boarding with them if they lived close to the school.

In 1923 in the one room school there were 72 students with one teacher, Teacher Bickel. A long church bench sat in front of the school where each class assembled to learn their particular lessons. The boys sat at one end of the bench and the girls sat at the other end. There was a potbelly stove in the center of the room used to heat the school, and those who sat close got extremely hot! Teacher Bickel started the stove every morning in the winter and sometimes it wasn't real warm as he had gotten a late start that day. The older boys carried wood in, to be used the next morning for heat. Lunch pails were kept in the hall way, and in the winter lunches would sometimes become frozen by noon. Older girls such as Adeline (Beyersdorf) Neuenfeldt and Edna (Scharf) Loesel had to stay after school to clean the floors. School was in session until 4:00 p.m. After they were done cleaning they walked home. Edna walked ½ mile and Adeline had a 1 ½ mile walk. Needless to say, it would often be dark in the winter before these chores were completed and they made it home.

During Lent, church services were on Friday's at 8:00 am. Everyone attended and school did not start until 9:00 a.m.

Summertime was much fun with games of Annie I Over, Pom Pon Pull Away or Taddy. Many softball games were played in the warmer weather. The last day of school a picnic was held. It was always great fun as each student received three 5 cent tickets, paid for by the congregation, to purchase candy, pop or ice cream. The ice cream would come from Mooney's or Watson's with a choice of

vanilla or strawberry. Entertainment was written by Teacher Bickel. Several men would carry the piano into the woods (where the current teacherage stands) for music. A stage was made out of logs, cut out of the woods, as well as benches for the parents to sit and watch the performance. After the play the fun began at makeshift stands for the pop, candy and ice cream. In 1927 the program was moved into the school, the stage was a flat rack wagon and the teacher and pastor's garages served as refreshment stands.

In those days the school children made their own recreation. Winter brought ice on the creek and they skated for hours. Of course no one had watches and many times the students would be late for class. A student remembers a time when a group didn't return until 1:45 p.m. School was scheduled to return in session by 1:00 p.m. Forty five minutes late! Teacher Bickel was a little unhappy about that.

One student remembers a 12 year old boy being naughty. Teacher Bickel told him to go into the woods and get a stick for the appropriate punishment. Of course, in those days, boys kept a jack knife in their pocket. The boy was gone a very long time and pretty soon he walked in with a small tree the full length of the entire building. The top still had the leaves attached. It was too funny, but no one laughed because they didn't want to get into trouble.

Teacher Bickel served faithfully for many years until he met with an accident that shocked the entire community. In 1942 he accidentally came into contact with high a voltage electric line which was strung along the southern border of the church property. He was terribly burned and hovered between life and death for seven weeks. Teacher Bickel died August 14, 1942 having served Iva for 29 years bringing the school to high standards during that time. Following the death of Teacher Bickel, the congregation called Mr. Martin Merz from the Normal School at River Forest, Illinois. Teacher Merz was installed at Iva on September 6, 1942.

Teacher Merz recalls being called to teach after the passing of Mr. Bickel. The call came two weeks before school was scheduled to begin and just being newly graduated from college he took the call. At this time in his life he was unmarried, young and full of energy ready to accept his first teaching position at Zion Iva Lutheran School. There were 35 students when his mission started, and he taught all eight grades. The following year Martin married his wife, Ivis. They began living in the house the congregation furnished for the teacher and his family.

By this time the school was heated by coal. During the cold months two students would have to keep the coal bucket filled for the week. The stove had a pan on top in which water would be kept so the students could put their lunches on. By noon the lunch would be warm. In the other corner stood a crock with water that was replaced each day for the students to have fresh drinking water. There were no flush toilets but instead two little outhouses in back of the school. When cold weather came nobody lingered very long back there.

Games were played outside for entertainment and recreation. Teacher Merz remembers during a game of Pom Pom Pull Away, Carl Roggow was running to the church as another student banged into him. He was injured very badly and Rev. Otto Richert took Carl to the hospital in Saginaw. Another time a young girl jumped off the swings to see how far she could jump. The children came to Teacher Merz and told him she was hurt and was going to come into the school by herself. He decided to carry her into the school. Everyone was laughing because he was carrying her. Lucky for her he did, for she had broken her leg, which was thankfully repaired. Many games of softball was played through the years. Most of the time there would be two games going at the same time. A number of softball games was played with St. Peter. Mr. Loesel, principal of St. Peter, would call and set up scrub games as a surprise to the students. Everyone had a great time and many friendships were made.

The school began to grow rapidly. Teacher Merz started picking up and delivering students to and from home with his own vehicle. This vehicle was a car that soon became too small and he purchased a station wagon in which Mildred (Stenzel) Parker remembers getting a ride home each day. In the Spring the roads were bad and Millie remembers the car hit a rut and broke a tie-rod. All the repairs and maintenance were of course paid for by Teacher Merz. Eventually he purchased a used school bus to enable him to transport the students to and from school. He always kept his eyes open for a newer and better model bus. During the course of time he had purchased three busses in all. In doing so he could repair and interchange used and broken parts and make one good bus. In those days winter brought much more snow and they didn't have ways to remove it from the roads. Teacher Merz would often carry students over the snow banks so they could get to their homes.

It seemed in those days since recess and lunch hours were primarily done outside, through the years when a student would get hurt or skin a knee, Teacher Merz would send them to his wife to take care of the problem. It seems like one time or another every girl would fall and ended up with some nasty green cinders embedded in their knees. The girls did not wear slacks so the knee got the cinder burns. Sometimes the boys fell too and would have them in their arms or hands but they were either tough or didn't like the stuff Mrs. Merz would put on it after she cleaned the scrape. She would always say, "This is going to sting", and it did! If someone fell in the mud or water and they were all wet or dirty, if they wore the size of any of the Merz's children, they would end up with some of their clothes until the wet ones were dry. Many times a student would come to school and say "I forgot my lunch." Mrs. Merz would fix them a sandwich so no one would go hungry. The end of each school day was usually closed with Mr. Merz walking to the piano for a hymn verse such as "Abide with Me".

When the Detroit Tigers played in the World Series Mrs. Merz would post the score in the house window. Teacher Merz would look out the window of the school and look at the window in the house and report the score to the class at the end of each inning. ( No satellite dishes or cell phones back then!)

Mr. Merz remembers many good times such as 8th grade class trips in which he and parents would drive the students to places such as Lansing to the State Capital and Lake Lansing Recreation Area. They even went as far as Cedar Point. They had to leave Zion at 4:00 a.m. in order to spend a few hours there and arrive back home the same day. If one of the parents had problems on the way home, since there was no way to communicate with each other during travel, like the cell phones available today, many anxious moments were spent wondering where they had ended up.

Marie (Laurenz) Walter started at Iva school in the fall of 1943. "It was a while before I came to realize that our school and church had an official name of Zion." World War II was on every adults mind, but as children they didn't really know what it was all about. We collected scrap metal such as tin cans, and newspapers which were stored in the old horse barns behind the school, until someone would pick it up and take it to a collection center to help the war effort. Along with that was the rationing of gasoline. New tires could not be purchased. At that time no one was taken to or picked up from school. It was either walk or ride a bicycle.

There was always "memory" to learn and recite every morning. Teacher Merz would hear every child recite at least a few lines. There were eight grades in one room so many subjects were repeated eight times. During religion class the children that would be getting confirmed would leave and go into a small back room with Rev. Otto Richert. The younger children thought that was cool and couldn't wait until it became their turn.

It was a simpler time, as neither the school nor the church was ever locked. We were not supposed to go into the church and probably never used the front doors. There was a door in the back and on

occasion we would venture in and peek into the empty church. We also discovered that the church basement was very spooky.

As today, there were outbreaks of head lice. To prevent further spreading, the County Health Department issued a program that all children had to attend school with all the hair on their head covered in some manner. This brought a variety of different solutions. Even Teacher Merz had to follow the rules. We had to do this for about three weeks. Finally it was over and all knew the meaning of being liberated without having to be told.

Sometimes students attend funerals because Rev. Otto Richert would usually be our substitute teacher if Teacher Mr. Merz was gone or was ill. If a funeral fell on a school day, both would be busy so the students attended the funeral. Imagine thirty plus students up in the balcony trying to be quiet. On occasion the students sang. If a funeral was held in the home, 4-6 students would sometimes go with Reverend Richert to sing. Students dressed in their "Sunday Best" on those days.

As enrollment increased over the years it was soon evident that the one room school had been out grown. On May 8, 1948 a new school was dedicated at a cost of \$48,700. It contained two classrooms, a spacious lunch room, and bathrooms. In 1949 a second teacher, was added to the faculty. With enrollment increasing a third teacher was added in 1961 with a petition installed in the lunch room to make an additional classroom. Teacher Merz was given the title of Principal on January 15, 1961.

In 1968 the Board of Christian Education was granted permission to call a second male teacher. Mr. William Cochran, a graduate of Seward, Nebraska was assigned to Iva. Mr. Cochran started basketball in the fall of 1968. The school was in a league with other Lutheran schools and played on Sunday afternoons. Zion's team used the old Hemlock gym for home games and practice. Even with new uniforms, not many games were won, but a lot of fun and a lot of friends were made. Mr. Cochran also worked with the Walther League, known today as the Youth Fellowship Group. Between Mr. Bill Cochran, and Teacher Merz, Zion built their very own track behind the school. The students could play outside and burn off some of their energy. Track meets were held at Zion as well as St. Peter, St. John and Frankentrost. Zion always had a good track team even though we did not have as many students as the other teams. There were many trophies awarded to the students of Zion. The children gained many Christian friendships through these events.

In 1969 a kindergarten class was added taught by Mr. Cochran.

At one point Zion had an enrollment of 125 students, four classrooms and even the overflow room was used as a classroom. There were hot lunches brought in from Hemlock Public School cafeteria in steel lunch boxes used to keep the food warm. There was definitely room for improvement as the food was usually cold. Plays such as "Three Men in the Fiery Furnace" were sometimes put on by the student actors in the lunch room.

In 1985 Mr. Martin Merz retired after serving his career of 43 years at Zion. The Merz's were honored with a program and potluck dinner in July of 1985. The Merz's built their first home in Merrill with the help of volunteers from the congregation.

In 1991 Mrs. Kathleen Mundt was instrumental in licensing Zion for preschool. On May 7, 1995 ground was broken for renovations to the school, including a new library, bathrooms, offices and a new kitchen. Dedication of the renovations was held on September 8, 1996. With the new updated facility, computers were soon added as well as some new playground equipment. A preschool/daycare program was added in 1996. With two teachers and enrollment at 9 students for the 2003-2004 school year the congregation voted in January 2004 to close the school at the end of the 2003-2004 school year and continue operating Zion Educare and look ahead to other possible

ministries at Zion. We look back upon the past 108 years that Zion congregation provided Christian education through it's day school and thank God for those years. Our prayer is for future opportunities to continue ministering to Zion and the community.

Teachers who served Iva were as follows: Carol Moeller 1949-1950, Miss Carol Riemer (Wardin), 1950-1951; Miss Faye Lindeman, 1951-1952; Miss Mary Lou Middleton, 1952-1953; Miss Elenora Biesenthal (Miller), 1953-1959; Miss Martha Otloe, 1959-1960; Mrs. William Van Zandt, 1960-1962; Miss Judy Secord (Seeburger), 1961-1963; Miss Janice Koosman, 1962-1964, Miss Lynette Wolf; 1963-1966; Miss Laurie Gruenbeck, 1964-1965; Mrs. Judi Zastrow, 1965-1966; Mr. Gene Schmidt, 1966-1968; Miss Ruth Kringle (Gugel), 1966-1968; Miss Carol Crawford 1967-1968; Miss Kathleen Schoeneman 1968-1971; Miss Gloria Glover (Nitz), 1968-1970; Jerry Hoppe 1970-1978; Lucille Moerer. 1970-1973; Kathy Meisner (Merz), 1971-1975; Elaine Buckley, 1975-1980; Anita Beyersdorf, 1978-1981; Judi Zastrow 1979; Romona Rogahn, 1981-1983; Kathy Martin, 1981-1984; Karen Wolgast ( Early), 1983-1986; Laura Busse, 1984-1985. David Sharp 1985-1999; Tari Schiewe 1986-1991; Mrs. Kathleen Mundt 1991-1999; Stephanie Bickmier 1992-1995; Anita Beyersdorf, 1994- ;Judi Zastrow 1999; Ronald Richert 1999; Julie Wheeler 2000-2002; Deborah Hauser 2000-2004; Debra Goetsch 2002-2004.

#### Principals Serving Zion Lutheran School

Martin Merz 1961-1985

Carl Hall 1986-1989

Rodney Goehmann 1989-1994.

Kent Kern 1994-1998

Dave Sharp 1999-2000

#### Sources

Martin Merz, Millie Parker, Edna Loesel, Marie Walter, various publications of church history.