

Early History of Trinity Lutheran Church

Town of Stettin

1856-1937

As written by Pastor P. Martin Pilz

and

Translated from the Original German Document to English

by

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The original early history document of Trinity Lutheran Church, written in German by Pastor P. Martin Pilz, was found in the church archive. In that the finders of the document were not certain about the contents, it was decided to have the material translated. During translation, it was discovered that certain information from the original document was included in Trinity's 100th anniversary booklet and also in the town of Stettin 1960 centennial booklet. However, there was a considerable amount of information not included in these booklets.

Thus, for your information and enjoyment, the following is a complete and precise translation by Sarah Litzer that matches the style of the original German language utilized in the document. Those reading the translation will gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the hardships and successes experienced by the early congregation.

Special thanks to the Kay Gruling & Tim Buttke family for covering the cost of the translation.

Preface

To write a congregation history that one has experienced personally is not easy, even for the person who possesses the talent. Since we don't possess any literary gifts, it is all the more difficult to write a truthful report – even more so as we are reliant upon incomplete minutes over the first 50 years of the congregation's existence as well as accounts from individuals who are well along in years for a glance at the congregation's beginnings.

If we attempt herein to give a brief depiction of the 75-year history of the congregation, it can only be a fragmentary report, since the founders of the congregation have long since passed away. With gratitude we remember Grandmother Wilhelmine Buttke who rests with the Lord, for she gave us valuable information regarding the founding years of the congregation.

Well aware of our own weakness, we would like in the following to point out to our present-day family and all of subsequent families the unchanging mercy and loyalty of God whereby he blessed our congregation in the seventy-five years of its existence through the promulgation of God's saintly Word and administration of the holy sacraments as appointed by Jesus Christ, our redeemer. Nor was there a shortage of times of unrest and internal battles, of sins, failings and afflictions by both shepherd and flock over those 75 years in the congregation, but Jesus, the sovereign shepherd of his flock, used these times to inwardly cleanse and purify his flock and turn these trials into special blessings.

May these lines also serve to honor him to whom all honor is due: "Jesus Christ." We humbly bow before him and say, "Not us, Lord, not us, but to your name be the glory for your mercy and truth."

August, 1937

P. Martin Pilz, Pastor

In the year 1856, when the local area was a dense virgin forest where bears, wolves, foxes and other such beasts of prey carried on their mischief and passing Indian tribes tarried, it was then that the first settlers established their humble home here in Stettin. Though most upon arrival had little in the way of earthly goods, they were still happy and content, with such a wealth of physical and spiritual health that neither did they forget their Lord in the new homeland. In addition to clearing and cultivating the land in a Christian manner, they also served in the family circles, faithful to the Lord, through edification from the Word of God and prayer, so that quite soon the desire arose to commemorate their Lord and Savior in shared services on Sundays, just as in the old homeland of "Pommern" [*Pomerania*] from whence they came. Hunger and thirst for the Word of God drove the first settlers to arrive at the houses on Sundays for shared services where a sermon would be read by Carl Eduard Buttke (called Clerk Buttke) after songs and prayer.

The arrival every once in a while of a traveling Methodist minister in the year 1859 was greeted with joy and P. Schaefer preached the Word of God to the settlers; but since he asked that they give him a tenth of their meager harvest consisting of corn and potatoes, and above all because they of Lutheran denomination didn't agree with his teachings, it did not lead to the founding of a congregation. In autumn of 1861, a Mr. August Friedrich Gebhard came to take on the instruction of the children in the English school.

The desire for a Lutheran congregation in their midst grew ever stronger. The wish was finally to be fulfilled. In the year 1862, the Lutheran settlers organized the "EVANGELISCHE LUTHERISCHE DREIEINIGKEITS GEMEINDE [*Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Congregation*] in town of Stettin and drew up a constitution. The founders of the congregation - as far as we can ascertain - included 23 members, namely: Ferdinand Buttke, Carl Buttke, Christian Buttke, Wilhelm Buttke, Carl Eduard Buttke, Daniel Radke, Gottlieb Kaatz, Carl Kickbusch, August Weinke, Christoph Kiepke, August Kiepke, Heinrich Zierath, Fritz Krueger, Wm. Marquardt, Fritz Marquardt, Heinrich Treibel, Fritz Kopplin, Carl Haasch, Gottlieb Radant, Gottlieb Boeck, Carl Erdmann, Gottlieb Wendorff and Friederich Beilke.

It was in truth a joy for the new congregation when at the meeting on March 2, 1862, they were given two acres of land by Mr. Heinrich Zierath for a cemetery and two acres of land for a parsonage by Mr. August Kiepke.

At this meeting, Mr. A. F. Gebhard - the teacher who had served up to that point as the secretary of the congregation - was unanimously elected to be pastor of the congregation. In the meantime, he obtained lay ordination to the Holy Ministry on April 16, 1862 by Mr. Carl Eduard Buttke. On December 5, 1863, Reverend A. F. Gebhard had a colloquium before the "Brotherhood of evangelical Lutheran Christians subscribing to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession" and was confirmed as a rightfully appointed minister of the Divine Word in the town of Stettin, Wisconsin.

Services at that time and in the following years were held in the District Schoolhouse No. 1 (close to the present town hall). In the year 1863, despite all outward poverty, the young congregation went to work building a parsonage (log house) which served in later years as a school house. On September 26, 1863, the young congregation in District Schoolhouse No. 1 incorporated.

Pastor A. F. Gebhard ministered the congregation with Word and Sacrament for approximately 3 ½ years, and then followed a call to the congregation in Cedarburg. The local congregation appointed the Reverend Keitel as their pastor on the first Sunday in September, 1865. Under his administration, the congregation built its first church, a frame church 48 by 36 feet in size, constructed for the most part with building materials delivered by the members. The members were able to erect the church in August of 1866. We can well imagine the joy when, after hard work, trouble and need, the congregation could commit their own church to serve the triune God.

It didn't take long for drops of bitterness to flow into congregational life. On the 12th of May, 1867, the congregation was without a shepherd. They remained lacking a pastor for the next nine months. On the 9th of February, 1868, Reverend Eduard Sitzmann followed the call to the congregation and appeared to be a blessing until the spring of 1870. Accustomed to city life, he and his wife were not able to adapt to the simple rural setting. Reluctantly, the congregation watched him take leave.

In July of 1870, the congregation once again called the Reverend A. F. Gebhard. From his pastoral work over twenty-three years, we would like to mention the following: just as both joy and sorrow, sunshine and cloudy days follow daily life, so too was congregational life at that time. If on the one hand, membership grew from the outside – since the congregation included settlers from present-day Rib Falls and beyond – then times of purification on the other hand did not fail to appear. Prompted by an uncharitable dispute in the year 1873, a few families at first withdrew from the congregation. An additional nine families joined them in January of 1875. These who had fallen away established another (competing?) congregation and were served from Wausau, Wisconsin by the Missouri [*synod*] Pastor Bretscher; yet under Pastor Gebhard and his successor, they did return to the old mother church.

There was a day of sorrow in the congregation when the dear church building where they had served the Lord in the morning was taken by flames in the evening on the first of January, 1879. The cause of the fire was never determined with certainty, but the view did come forth that the fire had been caused by a faulty oven. Right away at the next meeting, the congregation resolved to build a new church. A new trial came over the congregation during this period. Some of the members balking at building because their hearts hung upon earthly mammon, and others eschewing the long distance between the present town of Rib Falls and the area of the present-day burned church withdrew from the church, so the congregation whose membership had previously been splendid fell to 42 members. Undiscouraged, with trust in God, making true sacrifices, the little flock went to work building the church in which we tarry today. While the church was being built, services were held in the parsonage.

What a joyful day it was for the congregation in August of 1879 when this church that we also hold dear could be consigned to the service of the triune God, whereupon Reverend J. Ehmke gave the dedication sermon.

On January 3, 1883, the congregation resolved to build a new parsonage. The old house with its built-on "parlor" served as the school from then on - - the congregation now possessed a fine church property, but in the church with the tower pointing towards heaven like the finger of God, they missed the bells that they were used to back in the old homeland. So on July 20, 1884, they resolved to procure two bells which are rung to this day, kindly bidding one to the House of God, sounded to glorify God, and which have chimed to accompany many a tired pilgrim to his final resting place. On April 1, 1894, Reverend F. Gebhard resigned from his office at the congregation in order to follow a call to Harvel, Illinois.

His successor a short time later was the Reverend J. Ehmke who as a blessing served a little over sixteen years here as shepherd and minister. In the first years of his local work, the congregation acquired candelabra in December 1894 so that henceforth, an edifying Christmas celebration in which the children participated could be held on Christmas Eve – a tradition which persists today – and evening services could be held during Lent. On the 3rd of January, 1895, the congregation resolved to procure half an acre of land from the local town and exchange it with Mr. John Kiepke for an identical piece of land adjacent to the church property. For this reason, the present school was built in the same year. – As near as we can ascertain, the annual mission festivals to strengthen and encourage building of the Kingdom of God was introduced during Reverend J. Ehmke's pastorate.

A new sorrow came over the congregation in the spring of 1899. With God's allowance, the parsonage was ignited by a bolt of lightning and burned down though the pastor's possessions were able to be saved. On April 30, 1899, the congregation resolved to build a new parsonage and thereupon constructed the present one. - - It should also be mentioned that during this minister's employment, the congregation procured the present organ on April 3, 1910 and placed it in the service of the Lord. At this time, a sad divorce matter descended which caused much agitation in the congregation. In the middle of the year 1910, Reverend J. Ehmke asked the congregation for an amicable release to follow a call to the congregation in Baldwin Mills, Wisconsin.

The present pastor, P. Martin Pilz, followed him on October 24, 1910. We personally would much prefer it if someone else were to write the continuation of the church's history, but duty necessitates that the most important events of the ensuing period be cited for posterity, to honor God and for the greater good.

In order to establish uniformity of the service with kindred churches, a new order of service was introduced by the congregation in 1911, the liturgy of the Ohio Synod. On March 3, 1912, the congregation resolved to fundamentally renovate the interior of the church; this was meant however to provide the church with a new vestment for the 50th anniversary of the congregation. So the walls were covered with sheet steel and everything inside acquired a new coat of paint; a new altar with a statue of Christ and hymn boards (one, the gift of a member, Otto Tress) were purchased, and later in 1916, a baptismal font was added. On the last Sunday in May, 1912, the church could once again be consigned to its purpose at a ceremony in which the Reverend E. Boerer gave the dedication sermon. On the first Sunday in June of 1912, the congregation celebrated the fifty-year anniversary of the congregation. In the morning, a festival service was held in the festively decorated church. The previous pastor of the congregation, J. Ehmke, as well as Dr. W. D. Ahl, the synod president at that time and later professor of Theology, gave the festival sermons and the aged first pastor of the congregation, P. A. F. Gebhard recounted adventures from the founding years. This was followed by a noon meal in the woods, free of charge for guests and congregants. Nearly 1100 people were fed that day. Afterwards, a celebration was hosted in the woods during the afternoon. Pastors PP. [*Pastor Pastorum*] Wm. Spiegel, Karl Schmalz and F. Ficken spoke to the large festival assembly which had gathered fellow believers from neighboring congregations, while the local pastor led the celebration. We don't want to forget that jubilee donations were collected that day for the work of the mission. It was a day of jubilation for the congregation and of giving thanks for the rich undeserved blessing with which God humbled them over those fifty years.

With assistance from God, shepherd and flock continued the work of building Zion in their midst. In order to enliven the collective bond amongst the members, an annual congregation and school festival was introduced beginning in July of 1914 which has enjoyed general popularity up to this anniversary. In the morning, the congregation assembles in good weather for a service in the woods in which Christian child-rearing is especially celebrated. All of the members and guests assemble at noon for a shared meal and the afternoon is given over to a social gathering in which a program is presented by the schoolchildren consisting of songs, poems and dialog, and the men's choir, the wind choir, the youth and the old folk all participate for amusement.--- Let it be mentioned in conjunction here that the congregation – which of course must always hold the spiritual welfare of its children close to the heart as commanded by the Savior – adopted a resolution to give the pastor a teacher to assist with summer school beginning in 1917 so that the children could be instructed in basic catechism and biblical history in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This arrangement which was a blessing to the children – in fact to the entire congregation – was maintained until the year 1932 after which the pastor's daughter selflessly served alongside her father to instruct the children.

Wartime – evil time! Our members, who for the most part were of German extraction, experienced this well enough between April of 1916 and November of 1918 as our beloved fatherland was led astray and drawn into the World War. How easy it was then, for the agitators and patriotic fanatics in their blindness, to denounce the congregation members and loyal citizens of our country as “unpatriotic” and besmirch them. Despite this, the congregation was able to enjoy the means of grace at this grave time. At that time, the matter of the congregation’s constitutional language came up for deliberation. Although it might have been a blessing looking toward the congregation’s future to put the local language on equal footing with the German language in the services, the congregation came to the decision not to amend the constitution at the present time, but rather to append to it the following resolution: “Be it resolved, that in exceptional cases, the pastor has the right and may be allowed to use the English language.”

In February of 1921, the first pastor and co-founder of the congregation, Reverend A. F. Gebhard, who made his home on his son’s farm, was called from time to eternity, beyond life and death, to the Lord. With the entire congregation participating, the mortal remains were led to their final resting place in the local graveyard with all of the pastors present serving as pallbearers.

Only too easily, the congregation could have lost their beloved church in the year 1921. On Easter morning, the steeple was struck by a bolt of lightning which caused considerable damage indeed to the spire, however the church itself was preserved intact. In a heartfelt prayer of penitence and gratitude, we thanked the Lord for the merciful protection of the church.

We have now arrived at the year 1922. Church, school and parsonage have been given a fresh look on the outside. The congregation intends to celebrate its 60 year anniversary. Eager hands busy themselves making the final preparations for the celebration. On the morning of August 6, 1922, the congregation assembled in the church to listen attentively to the celebratory sermon by Reverend Ernst Boerger. In God’s open wilderness, in Mr. John Beilke’s woods, the participants shared a noon meal. That is where they gathered for an additional service in the afternoon in which the pastors of the sister congregations were to speak. But behold, during the first sermon, the clouds opened up and revitalized the thirsting nature by means of a refreshing rainfall – which resulted in the service having to be ended suddenly. In this way, the congregation was doubly bestowed with God’s blessing.

After the hours of gratitude, celebration and rejoicing, things went back to routine with its joy and misery. Just as joy and sorrow alternate in human life, so too in the life of the congregation. Even there, there is no lack of periods of trial and instruction; but the Lord rules with grace and mercy over all human sin and weakness as well as the heart’s desire for peace.

It was an uplifting holiday in 1929 when the congregation gathered to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the church’s dedication.

Reverend George Duerkop of Marion, Wisconsin preached at the main service. After a noon meal shared in the woods, an afternoon service followed at which Pastors PP. E. Nottbohm, Wm. Spiegel and J. Reiff spoke to the festive gathering.

When we look back at the years 1931 to 1935, we remember a time in the congregation's history when most of the members' hearts were saddened and their faith and trust in God was put to a difficult test. This period of trial was dominated by plagues of locusts and drought, and crop failures as a consequence, so members felled young trees during the summertime so that the livestock could quiet their hunger with greenery from the leaves. Then on top of that, the economy collapsed such that all of the banks in the country had to be closed for a time whereby a shortage of money arose for many causing financial hardship. How many of us looked to the heavens with a heavy heart that summer, wondering whether a refreshing rainfall would revitalize nature. Many a prayer in the church at that time, individually and jointly, ascended to God's throne of mercy.

The economic hardship in the country had in truth a negative influence on congregational life. Not perhaps in such a manner that members might attend services less often or keep holy the sacraments – but that a good many members could not meet their obligations to the church, and others only with abnegation, and a number of them just didn't make the effort to help bear the burdens which in turn aroused discontent among those who previously were willing. Some encouragement and some mediation were necessary on the part of the council which worked together in true unity with the minister in order to achieve peace in the congregation. During these years, even the most necessary improvements to the church property had to be put aside.

But the Lord in his grace and fidelity also helped us get over this period of trial; for periods of trial when viewed from the proper perspective are always periods of blessing for Christians. Scarcely had the economy started to recover, congregants set off with diligence to restore the church property to a worthy condition, whereby every now and then on a given day, 20 or more members worked as busily as bees, willingly and without pay; so that one could soon notice all kinds of improvements. Alongside the men, neither did the diligent Martha and Maria hands of the women's organization lack eagerness to decorate the church and school. Church, school and parsonage all received festive garb on the outside. They were decorated for the 75th anniversary of the congregation which was to be celebrated on the 3rd Sunday in August, 1937.

Seventy-five years of the congregation's existence have passed. What a time of grace! The founders of the congregation have long since passed away. They rest in part outside in the graveyard, awaiting the morning of the Resurrection. Children and children's children have now taken their place in order to receive the precious means of grace here in their midst; by which they and their children – poor, inherently lost and damned sinners – will through God's good and holy spirit not only become blessed and pardoned children of God, but also be able to remain so.

Seventy-five years of grace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ have passed by which the precious Word of God proclaims plainly and purely, and the holy sacraments as appointed by Christ dispense - in the mother tongue of the congregation's founders, namely the German language – the seeds of our Lord's grace to poor penitent sinners: the forgiveness of sins, life and blessedness were delivered wherever weakness in faith was strengthened, challengers righted, those gone astray shown the right path to salvation and peace in Jesus' blood and wounds; cold, half-hearted and apathetic souls were encouraged to fight the good fight of the faith; where children came into the holy community with the triune God through holy baptism; where the youth renewed their baptismal bond after fundamental instruction in the Word of God at the confirmation altar and gave a vow of faithfulness to the triune God unto death; where Christian couples received the blessing of their God at the marriage altar; where the infirm were brought the solace of the gospel and the dying the last provisions for the journey; where the bereaved and the sorrowful were comforted, the weary and heavily laden refreshed, and the lonely and forlorn found abundant succor in Jesus.

May the local language yet appear alongside the German language in the near future; one thing is and will remain the same: the precious Word of God and the Holy Sacraments.

ORGANIZATIONS

The oldest organization within the congregation is the men's choir. In the year 1911, there was a wish expressed amongst the men to form a men's choir which might let its songs ring out at festive occasions to glorify God and to entertain. This choir sustained itself to this day - which is rarely the case with church organizations - and can look back upon a twenty-six-year existence. It has always enjoyed great popularity in general. We wish them new enthusiasm to continue their existence and we are desirous, that other men to whom the Lord has given the gift of singing are henceforth willing to serve their Lord and their congregation along with their fellow brothers.

We want to mention that in the year 1925, a youth organization was formed in the congregation that unfortunately only lasted three years. In the short period of its existence, it had laudable accomplishments. Evidence of this are both the crucifix and candlesticks on the altar and some home bibles which members of the youth organization received when they married.

In the year 1927, the wish was expressed among the women of the congregation to establish a women's organization which might serve their own congregation and the Kingdom of God through works of love and charity. The wish became deed. This organization may look back upon nearly ten years of activity. Though the number of members could also be much greater, indeed we must say that despite the low number of members, the organization was unremittingly active doing much good for the good of the congregation, as evident from new altar and pulpit linens, new dishes, carpeting in the church, and palms. In addition, they proved to have a willing heart and open hand for the outward needs of the church and the works of the mission. May many women become willing in the future to follow the example of their sisters and, in the true sense of Martha and Maria, serve the Kingdom of God.

At the New Year's assembly in 1936, members of the congregation expressed the wish to be allowed to establish a wind choir within the congregation that might serve their own congregation as well as Lutheran congregations in the surrounding area at festive occasions with church music and entertaining pieces. The resulting members went enthusiastically to work and did not allow themselves to be disappointed by any efforts or costs in order to learn the noble music. Though this organization has also existed only a relatively short time, the wind players have indeed managed through diligent practice to ring out their melodies at a few festive occasions. May the legacy of the wind choir always bring honor to God and may God's blessing attend them.

We're hurrying to the finish. The congregation anniversary has arrived. Invitations to participate in the celebration were issued to the sister congregations. The arduous preparations have been completed. The church and festival area in the woods have been decorated.

In the church, , we have just listened attentively with gratitude to the fortifying and encouraging sermon by the esteemed president of the Wisconsin District of the American-Lutheran Church, Pastor K. A. Hoessel of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A shared noon meal will unite all of the celebration participants. At the celebration in the woods afterwards, Pastor H. Achtenberg of Wausau, Wisconsin will hold an English service at which Pastor Geo. Diemer of Edgar, Wisconsin will serve as Liturgist and Pastors PP. Wm. Spiegel of Wausau, E. Beyer of the town of Hamburg, and President K. A. Hoessel of Milwaukee, Wisconsin will give short speeches in the German language. The next day, August 16, 1937, Pastor E. Nottbohm from the town of Wien will specially commemorate the youth and the organizations in his sermon at the evening service.

May this anniversary of our Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Congregation be a celebration to honor and glorify the holy trinity in the true sense of the word.

May God rule with mercy.

Trinity Lutheran Church – Town of Stettin
Early Church Data as Compiled by Pastor P. Martin Pilz
(Retyped by Bob Gruling)

Pastors of the Congregation from 1862 – 1937

1862 – 1865	Pastor F. Gebhard
1865 – 1867	Pastor Keitel
Nine Months	Without a pastor
1868 – 1870	Pastor Eduard Sitzmann
1870 – 1894	Pastor F. Gebhard
1894 – 1910	Pastor J. Ehmke
1910 -	Pastor P. Martin Pilz

Note by Pastor Pilz: Three sons of the congregation – Leo Tank, Johannes Ehmke and Martin Ehmke studied and entered the ministry. Leo Tank and Johannes Ehmke have already passed away and Martin Ehmke, because of poor health, has resigned from the ministry.

Pastoral Acts (Statistics) 1862-1937

Baptisms	1472
Confirmands	948
Marriages	403
Funerals	469

Elders of the Congregation from 1862 – 1937

1862-1865	Ferdinand Buttke – Treasurer	3 years
1862-1866	Carl Kickbusch	4 “
1862-1867	Carl Erdmann	5 “
1865-1868	Wm. Marquardt – Treasurer	3 “
1866-1869	Carl Buttke II	3 “
1867-1870	Christoph Kiepke	3 “
1868-1871	W. Fraedrich – Treasurer	3 “
1869-1872	Heinrich Zierath	3 “
1870-1873	Christian Buttke	3 “
1871-1874	Friedrich Saager – Treasurer	3 “
1872-1899	Fritz Kopplin	27 “
1873-1876	August Krueger	3 “
1874-1883	Alb. Wendorff – Treasurer	9 “
1876-1882	Christian Buttke	6 “
1882-1885	Carl Erdmann	3 “
1883-1901	Gottlieb Geske – Treasurer	18 “
1885-1888	Fritz Saager	3 “
1888-1897	Herm. Beilke	9 “
1897-1900	Julius Weinke	3 “
1899-1903	Carl Wendorf	4 “
1900-1906	Aug. Seehafer	6 “
1901-1912	Julius Weinke - Treasurer	11 “
1903-1908	Fritz Rusch	5 “
1906-1912	Wm. Dehnel	6 “
1908-1917	Herm. Kiepke	9 “
1912-1927	Wm. Buttke – Treasurer	15 “
1912-1930	C.A. Anklam	18 “
1917-1924	Carl Schewe	7 “
1924-1935	Edward C. Wendorff	11 “
1927-1937	Otto Rusch – Treasurer	10 “
1930-	Fritz Seehafer	
1935	Wm. Koenig	

Trustees

1937-1938	Carl Koenig
1937-1939	Otto Zunker
1937-1940	Aug. R. Erdmann