

## A Foothold in Iowa

There were many kinds of Germans in early Iowa: Hessians, Bavarians, Prussians, Saxons, Lippe-Detmolders, Württembergers, and others. Some were free-thinkers and opposed to the Church. Large numbers were rationalists, explaining events without reference to the usual religious forms. Moreover, many were hostile to the Church, being rough-and-tumble toward the preachers. Still others, however, felt lost without the Church and were eager to assemble as congregations. Many denominations were represented among the Germans: Baptists, Brethren, Congregationalists, Evangelicals, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Reformed, Roman Catholics, and more besides. Five were served by the American Home Missionary Society.

The German Church Society (*Kirchenverein*), beginning with Missouri, widened its activities to include Illinois and Iowa. Uppermost was the thought of a regional development wherever the Germans proved susceptible to the religious appeal.

The earliest penetration of Iowa Territory by an Evangelical pioneer was made by the Rev. Joseph Rieger, a Bavarian and former Catholic,

who came over from Illinois in 1838 to preach at Fort Madison and West Point. In his own account of the first communion service, Rieger states: "We had only cornbread and a common tincup as chalice but the people were glad and did not harp on externalities." During a brief stay at Alton, Illinois, prior to this experience, Rieger had roomed with Elijah P. Lovejoy, a young Presbyterian minister and editor of the *Alton Observer*. Both were abolitionists, Lovejoy paying with his life for his beliefs. Rieger became an officer in the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society, serving with Congregationalists and Presbyterians.

Not long afterward, Rieger returned to the old country, married, and came back with his bride in 1840. Although too late for the actual organization of the *Kirchenverein*, Rieger qualified as a charter member. Following additional work in Illinois, he came to Burlington. Here he ministered to a group of Germans who had been meeting in the garret of the house belonging to John Phillip Kriechbaum. Up to the time of their organization as the First Evangelical Church on July 14, 1843, the members had been holding cottage services whenever a preacher came their way. Rieger now formed them into a church, thus becoming the first settled Evangelical pastor in Iowa Territory.

The twelve families of this congregation had no building of their own, but the Presbyterians generously offered theirs. During Pastor Rieger's

first year, twenty-four members were added; but, after his wife's death, the minister went back to Germany, remarried, and returned to Missouri but never to Iowa. At Burlington, Rieger had laid the groundwork of later Evangelical expansion in southeastern Iowa; and the church he founded is today the second largest in the Iowa Synod.

Just a few short years after Burlington had been provided with an Evangelical church, a very beautiful though fairly isolated spot in southern Dubuque County was being readied as the Iowa outpost of the German Reformed faith. It was in 1845 that Daniel Cort and his family left western Pennsylvania for Iowaland. Gradually, others from the Keystone State as well as from Switzerland also clustered about this new settlement, called Harmony. In response to their call for a missionary, the Rev. Daniel Kroh of Illinois formed the people into the Harmony church on Christmas Day, 1851, preaching in the English language. Kroh also installed the elders and deacons elected by the forty-three communicant members. No permanent pastor was secured, however, until 1853, when the church called Frederick C. Bauman, who had supplied the Harmony pulpit while still a student at Heidelberg College. Bauman accepted the call, was ordained by the Tiffin (Ohio) Classis, and reached Harmony in July, 1854. Shortly afterward, the place was renamed Zwingle after the Swiss reformer.

Pastor Bauman had the remarkable experience of becoming the first settled German Reformed minister west of the Mississippi River, and he continued to serve this same congregation until his death in September, 1909 — an unbroken record of fifty-six years. Bauman never received more than \$300 in cash in any one year, though many of life's necessities were provided for the pastor and his wife over this long period. There were six Bauman children, too.

Three acres were donated by Daniel Cort for use as church grounds, and the first church was dedicated in 1856. Shortly after this, the church came near burning from a prairie fire. Cort, aided by Simon Highberger and the pastor, saved it "with buckets of water and setting back fires," as Bauman relates in his diary. The church graveyard also was fenced about this time, and the entire premises touched up by the addition of lamp posts from Cascade for which Bauman paid \$15. The evergreens and maples planted by the pastor in 1869 were still living at Zwingle in 1951.

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