

THE LUTHERAN (MISSOURI SYNOD) CHURCHES  
IN LEE COUNTY, TEXAS

(Continued)

By Rev. G. Birkmann, Retired.

**St. Peter's Church at Serbin.**

This was organized in 1870 by a number of members who had withdrawn from Rev. John Killian's congregation. This new congregation (St. Peter's) existed for forty-four years. In 1914 it was again united with the mother church, to which also was turned over all of its property, consisting of church and school building and a dwelling for the teacher and land of which quite a number of acres had been bought by St. Peter's.

About fifty years ago, and for thirty years after both Serbin churches were in a flourishing condition. Each had its pastor and teacher, and St. Paul's membership was as large, or nearly so, as now after the two churches have been reunited. St. Paul (Killian) had about 700 baptized members while St. Peter's had about 300. So it seems, Serbin was more thickly settled at that time than now.

Quite a number of churches have their origin from the Wendish colony (Killian) in Lee County, eight or nine in this county, and ten in other parts of the state. People from Serbin moved to Austin, Port Arthur, Walburg (Williamson County), The Grove and Copperas Cove (both in Coryell County), Thorndale, Vernon, etc. And wherever they went, they soon began organizing a church and calling a pastor, or if they went to a place where already a church had been under way, they joined this church without delay, and tried in every way to help things along.

St. Peter's was the first fruit of this tendency of our Wendish people to multiply and start new church communities.

They at first had a pastor who was of Wendish descent, Rev. John Pallmer (1870 to 1873). He preached both in Wendish and German. He also preached at Fedor where in the same year (1870) a congregation had been started. Pastor Palmer was a faithful and very industrious worker, but he was soon released by death, resulting from fever, of which disease also his wife had died a month or two before, leaving him a child, and this child was later, after the death of Pastor Pallmer, adopted by teacher Leubner who sent the boy to college. Many of the older people in Serbin remember teacher Pallmer who for thirty years taught in St. Louis and elsewhere.

Rev. A. D. Greif was the second pastor of St. Peter's. He was a German, preaching only

in German, and so Wendish forever has been dropped from the pulpit of St. Peter's. In their school it never had been taught, Leubner being the teacher at first, and later also teachers were employed who did not know Wendish.

Pastor Greif was a gifted man, a ready speaker, who also tried to start a gathering of Lutherans in Giddings (1874 and 1875) and I have been told that he preached here at certain intervals.

Pastor C. L. Geyer was called in 1876 and remained until his demise in 1892. He had been a fellow student with Rev. John Killian at the German university of Leipzig and also with Dr. Walter and was a cousin of Walther. Geyer had been in the ministry in Wisconsin sixteen years, and after that sixteen years in Carlinville, Illinois, and his stay in Serbin also covered sixteen years. He was a quiet and unassuming character, but a most faithful pastor and a good preacher, and he did very much in making of his people a well-informed and indoctrinal congregation. His end came most unexpectedly. While distributing the Holy Supper he suddenly exclaimed: "I feel badly," and then sank. He was, however, caught up by some men of the vestry, was carried to his nearby home, where he expired the same day, calling on the name of Jesus and stretching forth his arms, as if to embrace Him. Geyer and Palmer are both buried in the Serbin graveyard, as is teacher Leubner and also the wives of these mentioned.

Rev. C. Bernthal was the next pastor of St. Peter's. He was a young man, only two years in the ministry. But strong and healthy, and kindly and hopeful, and he also was a good worker, also keeping school much of his time, when there was no teacher. He served the church in Serbin for thirteen years, and is well remembered by many. One of the teachers, his name was Herter, was fatally burned by the explosion of a gasoline stove, this occurred in 1896. Pastor Bernthal was visiting at his home in Michigan at the time, and Rev. Herm. Killian attended the dying man and buried him after his struggles had been ended.

Rev. W. Pott was the last minister of St. Peter's. He came there about 1906 and left eight years later, and then St. Peter's was served for a time by Rev. G. W. Fischer of Giddings. Much credit is due to Rev. Fischer that through his wise direction and persistent efforts the two Serbin churches again were made one. This happy event took place in 1914, eighteen years ago.

#### The Church at Fedor.

When Rev. Theo. Brohm of St. Louis visited John Killian and his church at Serbin in 1870, teacher Leubner told Rev. Brohm of the intention of some families at Fedor (then called West Yegua) to organize a church there. Rev. Brohm and Leubner rode horseback, perhaps the first time they had mounted a horse, to Fedor. There they found Mr. Boback who had bought a league of land to parcel it out to new comers from Serbin, and in order to attract settlers, I suppose, he donated fifty acres of the league to the church which was to be inaugurated in Fedor. Besides Mr. Boback, there were half a dozen other heads of families who agreed on the day that Brohm and Leubner were there, to be members of a new congregation. Among them Andrew Melde, Andrew Pillack, Matth. Domann, Ernest Lehmann, Gottlieb Schroeder, etc. This was the beginning of the Fedor church. Pastor Pallmer of Serbin was asked to preach to them for a while. 1871. Rev. J. A. Proft was called as pastor, and a modest dwelling was kept school for the parish. At first,

also Wendish was used in the services, after a year or two the Wendish was discontinued in church and school at Fedor.

In 1873 Mr. Jacob Moerbe came to Fedor, together with other families related to him, among them August Dube, Jonn Wuensche, Carl Dube and others. These men did much to give the church a good start. Some of their descendants still live in Fedor, for instance, Ernest Moerbe and Herm. Dube and August and Emil Dube, sons of Ernest Dube.

About sixty years ago, the congregation was admitted to membership in the Missouri Synod.

Pastor Proft and his family suffered much from climatic fever, as did some of his parishioners. This was probably caused by lack of good drinking water and by hard living conditions and at that time it was unknown that fever is produced by mosquitoes etc. Proft, the minister, built himself a house some miles away from the church, a house with two stories, and used the second story for sleeping apartments in order to escape from the fever.

In 1875 the first church building was erected and dedicated, and after being enlarged in 1889 this same building is still in use. The first school house was built in 1884, which served for 27 years, and then another schoolhouse was built and a few years later this also was enlarged, and this two room building is still doing good service. The present parsonage was erected in 1894 and the teacher's dwelling some years ago, after the first teacher's residence had been doing service for over forty-five years.

We shall now return to the time of Pastor Proft. His wife had died and he himself was in poor health, so he saw fit to resign at the end of 1875. The next year the writer of these lines was called by the Fedor church, after having completed his theological studies at the seminary in St. Louis. I then served the congregation for three years, from 1876 to 1879, in the latter year accepting a call to Dallas. Rev. I. M. Maisch was my successor for the next three years, and after his three years of service in Fedor he went to Walburg, and Fedor again sent me a call. I returned to Fedor in 1882 and then stayed with the congregation for forty years. In 1922 I was forced to resign on account of failure of my eyesight, and since then I have made my home in Giddings.

The Fedor church had a remarkable growth about fifty years ago, during the years of 1880 to 1885 when twenty new families came from Germany and from Serbin. In 1884, the number of people were almost double from what they had been eight years before. About fifty families were regular attendants at services, and from fifty to sixty children in school.

In the last years, however, of the last century, Thorndale became the center of interest for many of our people, for there they could get good land, raise more cotton and corn, and the upshot was that we at Fedor had to give letters of dismissal to quite a number of our good members, and within a few years we lost some thirty families, going to Thorndale or elsewhere. Their places were nevertheless, occupied by others, and the Fedor people were always mindful of the saying: "Be fruitful and multiply," and there was a lot of children and young people. So we see today that the Fedor church is still holding its own, they have two regular teachers instructing nearly a hundred children, and over three hundred communicant members, etc. Pastor Adolf Michalk is at present the minister there, and Messers Schroeder and Buuck are the teachers. They have German and English preaching, and Rev. Michalk is also conducting a Bible class.