

The Giddings News

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

By Rev. G. Birkmann, Retired.

I would tell a little story here of Rev. Proft which is characteristic of those pioneer days. Proft related this to me: He was out on the road riding a horse one day when he was accosted by a man holding a pistol in his hand and inviting Proft to come with him. Proft followed this invitation which was backed up by the pistol. They soon came to a house where they got off their horses and went onto the porch of the house. Then the man ordered Proft to lie down and rest a little, and the man himself lay down beside him, holding his pistol in his hand. After some time, Proft ventured to take a look, and saw that the man was sleeping. Proft then took the pistol and rode off. Some years later when living in Sherman, he showed me the pistol and said he was carrying it in his buggy when going from Sherman to Denison to preach, but he had never had occasion to make use of it, although he seemed to believe that the road was dangerous enough.

I will now proceed with my story of the Eben Ezer church. There were some families on the south side of the West Yegua who had belonged to the Fedor congregation but who now joined Proft in gathering a new assemblage of people to start a church about five miles from Fedor on the road going to Giddings. The location was not far away from Henry Schkade who is a well-known old settler and who with his brother-in-law August Lehmann belonged to the Eben Ezer church. Other members were August Wurm who tells me that he went to church in an ox-wagon; others were, Wachsmann, Sr., John Kieschnick, Werner, Aug. and Sam Meissner, Theo. Tonn, Aug. Birnbaum, and many others. Only a very few of these are now living, for instance, Birnbaum, Sr., Mr. Wurm, Henry Schkade.

The church was dedicated in the early spring of 1872. Pastor Proft stayed until the next year when he removed to Sherman and Rev. Jacob Kaspar was his successor. He had served the church at Blackjack (mentioned above) for ten years. He now lived at Eben Ezer for twelve years, and there still are a few who remember him, and he is yet living at the age of ninety years near Anderson, Texas.

Pastor Kaspar lived with his growing family under the same

roof with his church and school, which is to say that the people worshipped at his home and his schoolchildren had their lessons in the same place — just as had been the case in Serbin in the fifties before the first Serbin church was built in 1859. And so it had been in Fedor for three or four years, and the first parsonage at Manheim was united in one building with the meeting place.

This, of course, involved some inconveniences for the family of the pastor, but there were other difficulties to be met, and one did not much consider inconveniences at that time.

The first missionfest I ever attended was that at Eben Ezer church in 1878. Rev. Kaspar was one of those who introduced these festivals in our churches. Services were held under large trees near the church where seats were arranged for the congregation and the guests from other communities and a platform was built for the speakers. Rev. Simon Sues who had long been a missionary among the Negroes in West Africa was one of the speakers. He had been roughing it in the dark continent for some twenty years, often without any connection with any missionary society, and supporting himself from the products of the soil.

Rev. E. H. Wischmeyer was the preacher in English to the English speaking people at our missionfest that day. Some had come from Giddings, among them Sheriff Jim Brown.

This missionfest at Kaspar's church was a novelty to the people and from that time up to now our churches in Lee County and elsewhere have kept up this missionfest custom and have profited spiritually from it, besides collecting the money needed for missions.

Eben Ezer in 1884 numbered 295 baptized members and 180 communicants. There were 39 children in school.

The Eben-Ezer Church on San Antonio Prairie, 3 miles West of Lincoln (now defunct).

Pastor Proft, the first pastor of Fedor, was also the first pastor of this congregation, which was founded in the beginning of 1876 as was told in my last article that Proft had resigned from the congregation at Fedor. He then lived in his two-story house near West Yegua and there in the fall of 1875 he entertained the conference of all the Missouri Synod pastors in Texas who numbered only ten at that time. One of these was from near Austin (Rev. Hofius), one from Wm. Penn, Washington County (P. Klindworth), three from Harris County, Zimmermann, Maisch and A. H. Th. Meyer, two from Serbin, Greif and John Kilian, one from Warda (Stlemke) and one from Freiburg also called Blackjack (Kaspar) and Proft himself. This was the roster of that meeting. When they had met a terrific storm came up which destroyed the town of Indianola on the Gulf. The ministers were confined in that house for nearly a week, they however did not suffer any, they had enough to subsist on, slept upstairs, one beside the other, working downstairs when day broke again, and making their sermons conjointly for the next Sunday. They had a good time together, on the whole. When Rev. Meyer went home, the Prairie about Houston was all under water.

**Immanuel Church at Giddings,
Organized 1883**

I am not pretending to give a full history of this church or of any other, my intention being only this, to give some of my experiences and facts that I know. For particulars, one will have to consult the pastors of the different churches and the records they have. I know Rev. Fischer has such records of his church here in Giddings, and as next year will be the fiftieth of the life of the Immanuel congregation, we shall probably then hear or read more specific data about this church.

I know, of course, that Rev. G. Buchschacher, since 1881 pastor at Warda, soon began to preach also in Giddings. In 1882 teacher Henry Werner instructed some children here in a private school which was under the direction of Rev. Buchschacher and his people here, the beginning was small, of course, of both church and school. In 1883 a house was bought and remodeled to serve as church and school on the block now occupied by August Peter's residence. The membership in 1884 was only 15, which means voting members, there being 75 baptized members and 45 communicants.

During 1887 and 1888 the Rev. Theo. Wolfram preached here temporarily, as also did Rev. L. Ernst in 1889, both serving the church at Lincoln. Then Rev. Krenke was for two years the minister in Giddings and after him Rev. Kirschke (1893 to 1895). At the end of this latter year Rev. E. F. Moerbe was called and was installed early the next year. He remained here for thirteen years (1896 to 1908) and under his faithful ministry in church and school the congregation made fair progress. Moerbe's church in 1896 had 34 voting members, 280 baptized, 180 communing members, and twelve years later

here were 54 voting, 375 baptized and 250 communing members. The number of school children remaining nearly the same for this period, about 50. In the year of 1902 the present church was built, the old one was moved to its present location, and was used for school, after having been somewhat remodeled, and during later years another room was added to the schoolhouse. The church has now a parsonage and a teacher's residence.

Rev. Fischer has been the pastor for twenty-three years and witnessed a remarkable growth. According to the latest statistics there are 117 voting members, baptized 749 and communing members 530, school enrollment 95 (week-day school with two teachers). The budget for home purposes is over \$4,000 annually, and over a thousand for the work of Synod, besides the missionfest collections which usually exceed \$600. We are aware that large numbers of people attending church and great sums of money collected are not the main thing to look for, for the Kingdom of God is within us, as Christ says. Yet we have every reason to believe that Immanuel church of Giddings is also in this true sense a growing church.

St. John's Church at Lincoln.

The Eben Ezer congregation had been in existence ten years when a new church was built on the San Antonio Prairie in the neighborhood of what now is the town of Lincoln. Lincoln, however, had its beginning in 1889 when the S. A. & A. P. railroad was extended to those parts. The new church, however, was built in 1886, only two miles East of Eben Ezer church. The members of the new church had in part belonged to Eben Ezer and said they wanted a school nearer to their homes than that of Eben Ezer. So at first they were supposed to be building a schoolhouse, but when they had begun, they concluded they might as well build for church purposes also, and referred, got the consent of the mother congregation, and were

dismissed in peace. They dedicated their new place of worship in the same year, and temporarily, obtained a student to teach their school. Mr. Cholcher from Springfield, was there for the first year and then Rev. Theo. Wolfram was called as their pastor. Wolfram accepted a call to Iowa after one year (1888) and was later president of the Iowa District of our Synod. At the beginning of 1889 Rev. L. Ernst was called who served for almost fifteen years, and one year later teacher Herman Schroeder took over the work in the school, both men working together for many years in harmony and with splendid results. At the close of 1891, the present fine church was built, and the old one was used and is now still being used for school purposes. A parsonage was built and the teachers residence, both still in use. In 1888 their church had 138 baptized and 78 communing members and fifteen years later the number had risen to 440

and 227 respectively, and the number of voting members from 18 to 60. The school had two teachers and over 80 pupils. At the end of 1903 Rev. Ernst resigned on account of poor health and Fr. Wunderlich was the pastor for three years. In 1907 Rev. Osthoff was called and he has now been at Lincoln for twenty-five years. The recent statistics are: Baptized members 500, communing 246, voting 73, enrollment in school 72.

Transcript can be found in the Birkman blog at http://www.wendishresearch.org/blog_gotthilf_birkmann/?e=38