

**REV. G. BIRKMANN WRITES
OF LUTHERAN CHURCH
SCHOOLS IN LEE CO.,
1876-1932**

When I came to my congregation at Fedor in 1876, I began to keep school in the church building, for at that time there was no school building there. Rev. Proft, kept school also in a building erected for his church on San Antonio Prairie, about two miles west of Lincoln. He was soon followed by the Rev. Jacob Kaspar, when Proft had removed to Sherman, Texas. At Serbin there were two Lutheran church-schools belonging to two different congregations: St. Paul's and St. Peter's. At St. Paul's the teacher was Prof. Gerhard Killian, at St. Peter's Prof. Ernest Leubner. Both had had professional training at a normal college at Addison, near Chicago. Then there was the school at Warda, where Rev. Tim. Stiemke was teaching from 1874 to 1879; this school, however, is in Fayette County, and is mentioned here only because many of the children attending were living in Lee County.

So, until fifty years ago, there were four parochial church schools in Lee County, Fedor, San Antonio Prairie and Serbin. Just fifty years ago, however, a church school was opened in Giddings by Prof. Henry Werner, who also had been prepared for his calling in Addison. At that time Rev. Buchschacher of Warda preached to Lutheran people in Giddings, among them the old resident family Aug. Schubert, and Prof. Werner was called to instruct their children. He taught in Giddings until about 1886 when he accepted a call to Serbin. About 1890 the congregation in Giddings called Rev. Krenke and later Rev. Kirschke and then Rev. E. F. Moerbe who taught school for his congregation about ten years. The church now has two regular teachers who have chosen teaching as their life calling and who are both well known in Giddings, Mr. Karl Dube and Mr. Stroebel.

The church-school in Lincoln was started in 1886; the one in Manheim in 1890. In the school near Lincoln the teachers were first a theological student named Cholcher, now a well-known minister in Nebraska, then Rev. Theo. Wolfgram, after him Rev. L. Ernst, and in the year of 1890 Prof. Herm. Schroeder was called and taught school there for over twenty years, when he accepted a call to Serbin. He served there for fifteen years, resigning in 1926 (died Jan. 15, 1931, in Giddings).

The school at Manheim was first served by Rev. Aug. Wenzel, followed by Rev. Gesterling, then by Rev. C. W. Rische since 1896 until 1906 when Rische went to the Rose Hill church in Harris County, and was succeeded in Manheim by Rev. Streckfuss, and then by Rev. I. Heinemeler. Prof. Twenhafel was called to Manheim about 1919 and is still teaching there, being assisted by a lady teacher.

The Lutheran church of the Mt. Synod at Lexington had its first resident minister in 1894, Rev. Paul Schroeder. He also taught the school of his congregation, as did the eight or nine succeeding ministers. The church at Lexington now has a school building, and Rev. Kautz, the present minister at Lexington, is giving a good deal of attention to educating the children of his flock.

The congregation at Loebau called Rev. G. P. A. Schaaf in 1896 and he and his successors taught the school for years, however at present the church has for its teacher Prof. Wendland.

I shall now come back to my own church at Fedor. The congregation was organized in 1870 with about a dozen or so members. Among them, And. Domann, Gottlieb Schroeder and others. In 1871 they called

Rev. Proft who served them in church and school for nearly five years, with much interruption on account of sickness of Mr. Proft and his family. Proft resigned in 1875 from the church at Fedor and started another congregation on the edge of San Antonio Prairie, 2 miles west of Lincoln, as said above. I became his successor at Fedor, and besides my ministerial work I also kept school four days in the week. My chief aim was to teach religion by the aid of Luther's Small Catechism and by telling the children stories from the Bible, which they were asked to repeat and to read at home. We had weekly two hours of catechism and two of Biblical stories. We always went over what we had learned, before proceeding to the next lesson. Another hour was spent each morning teaching the children to read German, my aim being to have them practice much in order to become fluent in reading both German and English. English was taught in the afternoon. We also, as a matter of course, had arithmetic and a little geography. We much enjoyed singing our hymns in school and German folksongs. There were only very few English speaking Americans living at Fedor, among them the Riggs and Wests and a few others. After some few years however, there was not a single English speaking family in our neighborhood. They had sold out and gone elsewhere. German was the only language we usually heard and even those Germans who could speak English hardly found occasion to make use of their acquirement. There were new settlers in

our community year after year, some coming from Serbin, others from Germany direct. Conditions as here described existed over other sections of Lee County. Tracts of land were settled by Germans (or Wends coming from Germany); they then built a churchhouse which at first had to serve as a school during the weekdays. A pastor was then called and he knew when accepting, that he would have to also serve as a teacher of the lambs of his little flock. And that when the church had sufficiently gained in numbers, they then would also appoint a regular teacher. They did not rely on the public schools, in the first place, because there at that time were no public schools in the new German colonies. I remember well there was not one public school in the neighborhood of Fedor. Later, perhaps twenty years after the organization of my church, there was a public school four miles north of Fedor (called the Patschke school) and three miles east of Fedor there was another (on the road to Lincoln). Another on the road to Paige, also about three miles west of us. But this was many years after the founding of our church and school. Our people had themselves been pretty well schooled in the old country and when coming to this land they wanted their children to have as good an opportunity as possible to get an education.

The main reason, however, for beginning our church schools was that we desired to have our children well informed in the truths of holy writ unto our salvation. We held it to be necessary for them to receive daily instructions in these

truths and in the stories of the Bible, for God wants parents to teach their children His word and His ways as they are revealed to us in the Bible. And in our schools the teacher is supposed not only to teach, but also to help build up a Christian character in the children, to tender to their souls the necessary nourishment and to always direct them to their only Savior, Jesus Christ, true God and man. All of this, of course, cannot be done in public schools.

After some years of my own teaching in Fedor, the congregation called Mr. Henry Nehrling to be their teacher (in our school) and thereafter other men have done service there. I will mention Mr. G. M. Schleier who after leaving Fedor kept school in Warda for many years. In 1884 our first school building was erected, and in 1911 a new and larger building was dedicated, and after several years this was enlarged, and Fedor now has quite a good school building and two men are there giving their best, time and talent and energy, to their calling.

Since I first came to Texas, about thirty-five ministers have been teaching school in our Lutheran congregations in Lee County, and about as many teachers by profession and about half as many students of our theological seminaries and of our Synod's normal colleges. At present, there are nine regular teachers of our Synod (Mo.) in Lee Co., one minister, one student, and several lady teachers as assistants.

Of pupils there are many, but we get no help from any other sources but the contributions

of our church members, as is proper and we never try to obtain help from the State or those not within our churches. The schools cost about \$8,000 per year.

Transcript can be found in the Birkmann blog at:
http://www.wendishresearch.org/blog_gothilf_birkmann/?e=47