

History of the Campbellsport Reformed Church

(Evangelical and Reformed)

(Compiled by Rev. Gilbert C. Wernecke)

"They who live in history only seemed to walk the earth again." The circumstances which led our forefathers to organize a congregation of the Reformed faith are not recorded in the records of the congregation: these circumstances have been described to us by those who heard about it from their parents and grandparents.

A number of German and Swiss emigrants had settled in and about the village of New Cassel. Some of these had received their religious training in the Lutheran and other in the Reformed faith. They had brought with them from their home land the longing desire to unite in congregations and build churches and dedicate altars where God could be worshipped according to the faith of their fathers and their own belief. For some time it appeared difficult for the people to decide whether to organize a Lutheran or a Reformed congregation. It was finally decided to organize the German Evangelical Reformed New Cassel congregation.

Several families of Lutheran faith affiliated with the congregation and consequently the members of the congregation have always had a kindly feeling toward the Lutherans, as also to those of other faiths. Before the congregation was organized Rev. Accola, then Pastor of the Zwingli Reformed church of Ashford (now Elmore) conducted occasional worship services in the homes of the people.

It was in 1867 when the Rev. J. F. Vergens succeeded Rev. Accola as pastor of the Zwingli Reformed church; under his leadership worship services were regularly conducted in the District School house at New Cassel. On July 26, 1868 twenty-seven men met at the school house and organized "The German Evangelical Reformed congregation of New Cassel." The desire to build a house of worship was immediately carried out, and late in the fall of 1868 the congregation rejoiced in dedicating a building to the Service of God. This building was of substantial construction and served as a sanctuary for the congregation until January 1932. The Church measured 34 by 50; the approximate cost was three thousand dollars; this sum does not include the labor which the members of the congregation unselfishly donated. According to the records of the congregation, Mr. M. Findeisen donated the lots on which this first church was located. Among the founders of the congregation appear some familiar names: Peter Johann, president; A. Holzbauer, secretary; David Gudex, Jacob Terlinden, Martin Knickel, trustees; Peter Johann and P. Gaul, Elders; F. Dickman and C. Steinecke, deacons.

The congregation united with the Zwingli congregation of Ashford into one charge and was served by the Rev. J. F. Vergens until 1874. From 1874 to 1883 Rev. J. C. Buecker was the pastor. On July 1, 1883 Rev. J. C. Huecker preached his farewell sermon, and on July 2, a cyclone demolished the steeple and the roof of the church. The roof was repaired but the steeple was not restored until some years later. Rev. S. Elliker then became pastor of the congregation, 1883 to 1886. It was during this period that the congregation became independent of the Zwingli congregation. In 1887 Student Rucklin, a recent emigrant from Switzerland, was called to the pastorate of the congregation. Because of his peculiar views of Baptism, disharmony resulted, and after a few months the congregation was again without a pastor. Rev. H. Rusterholz, then pastor of the Ashford (Elmore) church served the congregation until 1888.

In the fall of 1883 Rev. J. C. Huecker, who had formerly served the congregation was invited to the pastorate. After he had accepted the call the congregation acquired a parsonage for the sum of one thousand three hundred dollars. In 1892 the congregation again erected the steeple on the church building; during the same year the Ladies Aid society was organized. In 1893 the Ladies Aid Society purchased a church bell weighing 1433 pounds at a cost of two hundred and seventy dollars; this bell is now in use in the belfry of the present church. On August 27, 1893 the congregation observed its twenty-fifth anniversary.

Rev. Huecker served the congregation until 1906; his successor was Rev. Calvin M. Zenk, serving from 1906 to 1908. During Rev. Zenk's pastorate several changes were made in the church. The Ladies Aid Society had a hardwood floor placed into the church; envelopes for contributions were given to those who so desired. The first service in the English language, according to records, was held on August 11, 1907. Catechical Instruction was in both the German and the English languages; a Young People's Society was organized. During Rev. Zenk's brief pastorate the number of accessions to the church was very encouraging.

In November 1908 the Rev. William Landsiedel was called as pastor of the congregation. For a few years the question of securing another parsonage was considered, but it was finally decided to renovate the old one. A telephone and electric lights were installed; the pastor's salary was increased from five hundred dollars to seven hundred dollars a year. According to the minutes of the congregation a Building fund was started in 1910.

In the fall of 1913, after the Rev. Landsiedel had resigned, Rev. William Zenk became pastor of the congregation. It was in 1917 when action was taken to have an occasional service in the English language. In 1920 the furnace was installed in the parsonage. Rev. Zenk also served the Fillmore Reformed Church; for several years he was Professor of Music at the Mission House College and regularly spent several days of the week at the Mission House. In the spring of 1927 Rev. William Zenk was called to the Church Triumphant. The widow with her children continued to live in the parsonage until another minister was called.

Rev. John Scheib served as pastor from 1927 to 1930. In 1929 the Women's Missionary Society and the Girls' Missionary Guild were organized. The Every Member Canvas and Duplex Envelope System were introduced. During Rev. Scheib's pastorate the congregation voted to use the German language at one service during the month, all other services were conducted in the English language.

The pastorate of Rev. Gilbert Wernecke began in August 1930. The Comrades, a society for the Young People, was organized in the fall of 1930. The hope of a better equipped church building was renewed when a Building Fund was started in January 1931. During 1931 the Constitution of the congregation was translated and revised; the name of the congregation was changed to "The Campbellsport Reformed Church." At a special meeting of the congregation in December, 1931, the trustees were authorized to sell the lots on which our old church was located to the Sisters of St. Francis, St. Joseph's convent, for the sum of six thousand dollars.

On Sunday, January 24, 1932, a Farewell Service was held in the old church. The present building was erected in 1932. Original plans called for a more elaborate building, but the early 30's were not prosperous and the plans were modified.

Rev. Wernecke was succeeded in 1936 by Rev. John Mohr, who served the congregation until 1949. The present parsonage was erected during his ministry in 1939. In the same year the Elmore Church dissolved and more than 40 remaining members joined the Campbellsport congregation.

Rev. Leonard Stockmeier accepted a call to this congregation upon graduation in the summer of 1950. He served the congregation until December of 1955. Rev. Dale Kuck received a call and was installed as pastor in the summer of 1956, upon completion of Seminary graduation. He was succeeded by Rev. Edwin Becker who was installed in November 1959.