

## **Ebenezer Reformed Church History**

Starting around 1849, immigrants began settling the fertile farm ground of Northern Illinois. One such adventuring soul was Jan Reints who is believed to be the first settler from the East Friesen area of Germany. After 1855 the number of German immigrants increased rapidly in this area, many of them coming from Ostfriesland.

For years, a number of the families from the Ostfriesland area were invited into the home of Harm Roos for a time of worship and singing. His farm was located about a mile north of the present church location. After some time, the group grew so large they could no longer fit in the log cabin home. They started searching for a more permanent meeting and worship space.

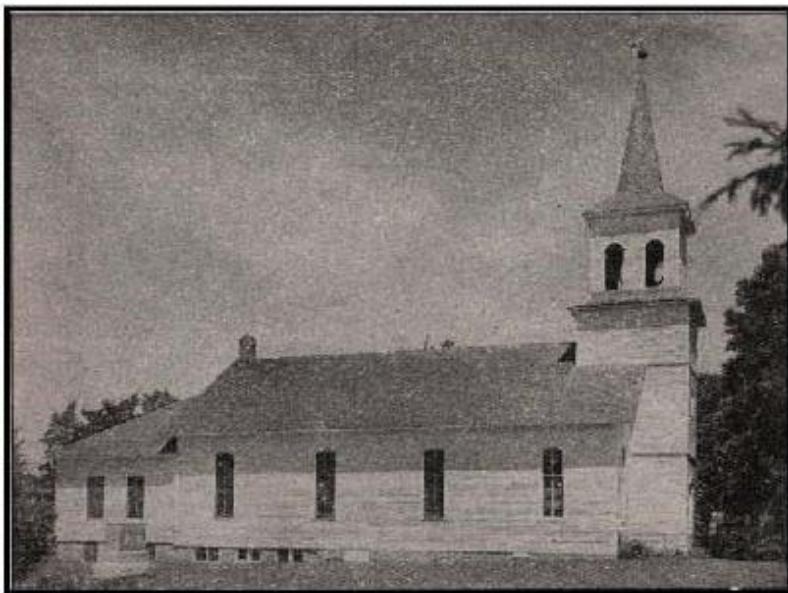
They were told of a school house that was not being used; it was located about two miles north and a little east of the present church. The school house was moved to a plot of land that was donated by one of the worshiping families. The exact spot where the school was moved and how the move was accomplished remains a bit of a mystery.

The official start of Ebenezer Reformed Church came a full twenty years after the known German immigrants settled in this area. Sometime in 1869, the Classis of Wisconsin received a petition and granted permission for the organization of a formal congregation.

Through the early years, various ministers from surrounding areas like German Valley and Forreston, as well as laymen of the church, provided the sermons during the worship time. As you can imagine, the congregation became anxious to have their own minister and in 1874 extended the call to Rev. L. Watermulder who became the first pastor.

On January 14, 1875 the decision was made to build a larger building. The original church structure was 40 feet by 60 feet and was built on the land across the road from the present church. There are many stories about this original structure, but here are a few we would like to share:

## HISTORY CONT'.



The Original Church  
(1944)

There was a partition down the middle of the aisle and men sat on the south side and women sat on the north side. There is no clear date as to when the partition was removed but the desire of families to sit together may have had some influence. Another story goes that every year at the congregational meeting there would be an auction of the pews for between 50 cents and \$5.00 and the members who paid the most were allowed to sit nearest the

front of the church. There was a section in the northeast corner of the church for those who could not afford to pay, or visitors. Early services were in the High German language and ran

about two hours long, from 10:00 to 12:00. The order of service was very much like it is today; prelude, invocation, hymn, scripture, pastoral prayer, hymn, sermon (45 minutes to one hour), closing prayer, hymn, benediction, postlude. The tradition of using the German language was also carried over to the Consistory minutes which were recorded in German until December 18, 1940. As the reader can see, tradition is a large part of



The Parsonage  
(1944)

Ebenezer and its history. However, as a church we know that we can never lose sight of the future that God has planned for us as individuals or as a church body.