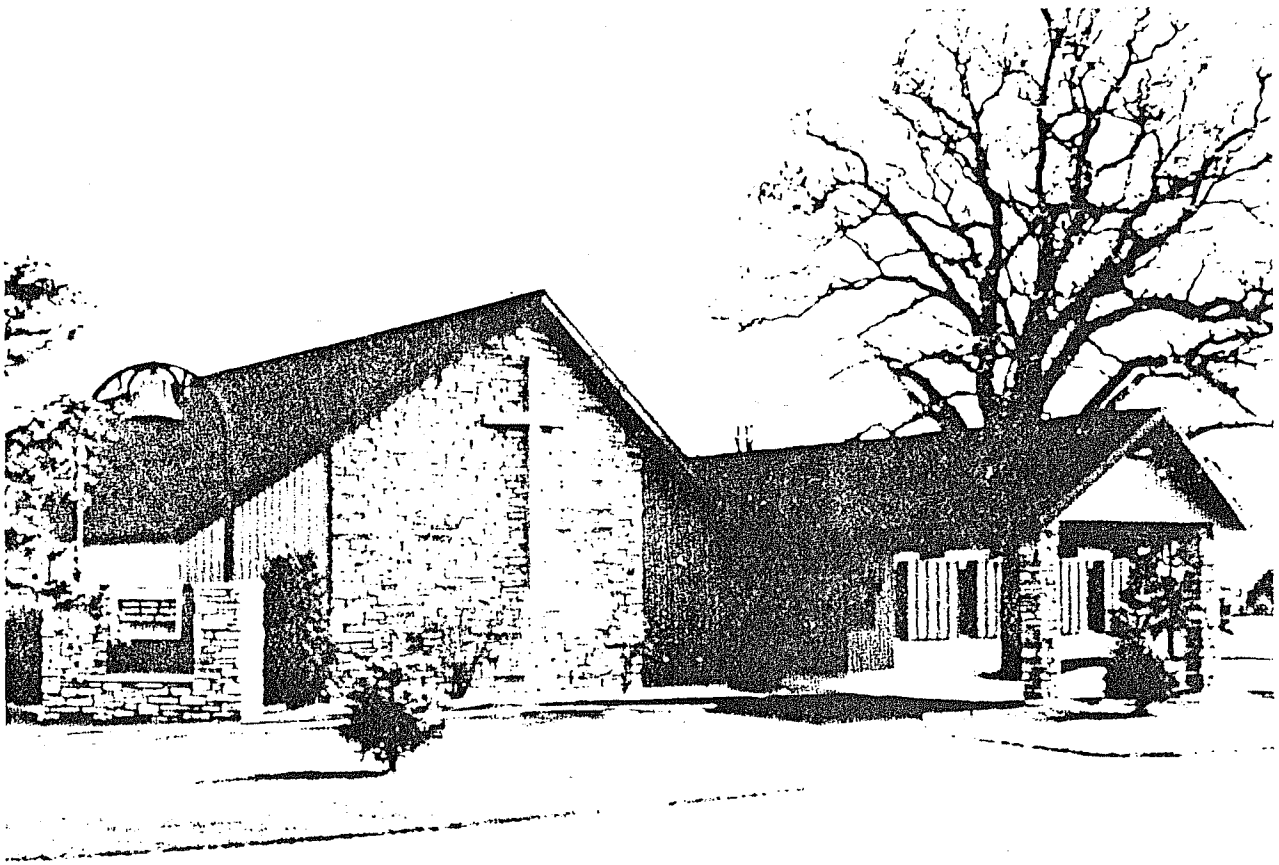


# IMMANUEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Town of Clayton



*A brief history by Robert Romberg*

# A brief history of Immanuel Lutheran Church. Past, Present, and Future.

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**Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.**

The history of Immanuel Lutheran Church is a history that goes back close to the days shortly after the civil war. While there isn't really any earth shattering news that will shock most people about the history of this church, this history taught me how God can spread his Word. God can proclaim his Word even in the most remote areas where most people might think that it could not survive. The Lord over the years has been with this congregation. He continues to preserve it as it now stands in the perfect position to be a growing church for many years to come.

## Early Beginnings

The earliest members of Immanuel Lutheran church began worshipping their Lord on May 16, 1873. They had no building. They simply had the urge, desire, and the courage given to them by God to join in fellowship. Even though their size was about a handful of people, the Lord was with them. The first 15 years they met at each others homes. The first pastor to serve them was pastor E. Markworth. Due to the fact that they were now worshipping on a regular basis, every Sunday afternoon, they

decided that a church building would be their first project. Being the typical conservative Germans that they were, they decided not build until they had the money. They did not build a building until the year 1888. The first building served them for 96 years.

Since they didn't have much money, the Lord saw to it that a person donated them some land. (This land that they were given was provided for free.) The only catch was that it must be used for church purposes.

*to donate means to give with no cost to the recipient*

Back in those days they were not under any type of mission status where the synod supported them. They simply had to support one another. The people just got together. From 1873 to 1888 they shared a pastor with Trinity Lutheran Church in Neenah, WI. After the church was built in 1888, they continued to share different pastors until 1920. From 1920-1975 they decided it would be easier to share pastors with Immanuel Greenville. Services were held in the afternoon. All this was going on even before they had motor vehicles, back in the days of horse and buggy.

What happened to this building that no longer exists? It was torn down for safety reasons. They had to tear it down because they discovered that it was a fire trap. By 1979, they had out grown the old building and it was the first time that they went with two services in the old building.

## Dimensions of the Old

What did it look like? Well, I've included a picture of what the front of the church looked like. In the video that will be included in this paper you will get to see a model of the church. The dimensions of the old building were lost, but we have some estimates. The old church held about 90 people. They had about anywhere between 12 and 14 square feet. The church looked like the typical country church. They had the smallest balcony, and the smallest organ that you could get. Not only did this building later become a fire hazard, it also only had a center aisle. Keeping these few facts in mind, you can see why the people in the congregation or the fire chief weren't too happy with the building. The basic architecture design of the old church is <sup>way</sup> a German Gothic style. The old building was your basic old flatboard country church. The church was heated by a wood burning stove. It was said that if it was cold out, people would get as close to the stove as possible that was in the front of the church. The pastors kind of liked that because the people would then sit in the front, instead of always sitting in the back which is what the typical WELS congregation does. The lighting I thought was rather interesting. The only lighting in the church was one fancy kerosene lamp. They had to lower it from the ceiling to light it. The old church also had typical large, German style pulpit with a

canopy that you entered from the sacristy. The canopy was later removed due to the age.

## **The cost of the old**

Back in those days, it didn't cost as much to build a church. But money was about as hard to come by as it is today. They simply took up a collection. When they had the money, they built the church. As I mentioned before, these people were very conservative. They weren't going to go into debt for anything. They tried to find the original cost for the centennial anniversary of the church, but they couldn't find the records. The approximate cost in yesterday's prices would have been about \$10,000.

## **Blessings of the old church**

People volunteered to build the church. You can tell that one crew worked differently than another. Pastor Zwiag mentioned in the interview that when they tore down the old, you could tell that different boards were used on different sections of the church. They did what it took to get it done. They weren't that concerned about the looks as much. They were just happy to have a building that they could worship their Lord in. This was something they had been without for those first fifteen years. Now that

they had a building, it was their sincere hope that they would grow more. God blessed them in this department slowly, but surely.

## **Additions to the old**

The fellowship hall that you will see in the video, was added later to the grounds as a separate building. The main reason it was built was to provide space to hold Bible class and Sunday school. It really helped in another way in that people used to stay after church and visit more. This fellowship hall was larger than most churches of this size. Many members thought it was too large. It is now too small for <sup>because</sup> the capacity of how fast this church is growing.

## **A New Church to replace the old**

In the early 80's the members of Immanuel realized that the old church was on its last leg. When tearing down the old, they suddenly realized how bad and dangerous the old building had become. Things were so bad that it was said that you could twirl the rafters with one hand due to the dry rot of the wood. Even though tearing down the old building brought many people to tears <sup>because of</sup> over their love for the old building, many were also the tears of joy as they saw the new one being built.

What were the improved things with the new? More space, they only needed one service. They believed that if they could fit the people in one service the church would be closer fellowship wise. This has happened. Another blessing with the new is that the sound-acoustics were greatly improved. The best fact is that it looked as though they were going to survive. Many members thought if the old one was torn down Immanuel would be history. But now people knew that they were here and here to stay. At last, they now look like a <sup>congregation</sup> presence that was serious about keeping the <sup>g</sup>Gospel preaching in this area. The city of Neenah that is directly to the north of this church, is also growing. More people are moving out to this area because they want to get away from the crime in the city, to the peace and privacy of the country. <sup>During</sup> The last few years they have gained members simply by people moving into the area. The members of Immanuel still know that the Word of God is still the most important, and the new building was also a help in encouraging people to give them a try. Pastor Zwieg compared it to something like the Brewers getting a new stadium. Special services were helped since now they had room to decorate more, beautify the altar etc. As you will see in the video, the atmosphere is much more conducive to worship.

awkward  
sentence

How long will this new building last? The new should last for many years to come. The roof may be needed to be replaced in the next five to ten years but that is normal maintenance. They will then change the roof

design slightly. The <sup>efficient</sup> windows are very energy sufficient and donated by the members. The church is so well insulated that you can hardly hear the bell ringing outside to begin the service.

## The bell

Speaking of the bell, there is an interesting story that goes with it. The bell on the outside of the new was part of the old. It was in the bell tower of the old and this tower was struck by lightning in 1947. A member happened to be driving his horse and buggy by when the lightning hit and started the tower on fire. The tower was never rebuilt in its original form. It was a major job to take the bell out of the old and put it in the stand on the outside of the new. Today they have the bell outside in a separate stand. You will see this in the video. The model of the old church shows it in its original form. The picture included in this paper is what the church looked like after they made repairs from the lightning.

## Cost of furnishing the new.

A man in the congregation by the name of Ed Huebner Jr. built all the things in the altar area. This included the altar, pulpit, lectern and communion railings. He also did all the work on the cross that is above the altar. You will see this at the end of the video. To furnish the



building was well under \$10,000. The fellowship hall that was built much earlier was built around a cost of \$40,000.

## Problems with the new building

The new church was greatly blessed with really no building problems. The only problem was that they were held up three weeks because of the dry waller. Yet they finished a week earlier than scheduled.

The other little problem which really wasn't much of a problem at all was what color should the padded pews be. The church voters tied twice when trying to decide on the color. They had to decided between maroon and blue. Pastor Zwieg finally settled the vote and went with maroon.

## Cost of the new church and additions

The cost of building this new church was around \$111,000. They latter added a south and north annex for more space. When this was added later, they had to do it at a cost of about \$100,000! This is almost as much as it cost to build the church a few years earlier! Isn't it amazing how much it costs to build things and how much prices have gone up in recent years? I was shocked. The front annex provides a place to drive your car up and drop off your wife and <sup>children</sup> kids with a shelter from the rain. The back annex was added for more space to stand and talk after the end of the service.

Both give more space to the church and provide the people with plenty of room before and after the church service.

## Population

As I stated earlier, Immanuel only started out with a handful of people. When Pastor Zwieg began serving them in 1975, they had 180 communicants. The church has grown today to about 250 in the last 10 years.

## A history of the pastors that served Immanuel

One of the more interesting aspects I tried to discover was the history of the pastors that served Immanuel Lutheran Church. I attempted to get some information on the pastors but I ran into many of dead ends. Most of what these early men were like will probably always remain a mystery. I go into a history of most of these men a bit in the video. The 1st four men traveled around back and forth from Immanuel to Trinity in Neenah, WI. After these men, there served also a father-son team that ran things for a while. Pastor Zwieg's only recollection could only be placed on some of the later pastors that served in the most recent years. According to Pastor Zwieg, the Rev. Kaspar who served the longest was well loved. The next <sup>pastor</sup> guy was Gieschen and he only lasted 7 years because the

members didn't like him and his health was failing. All these men lived away from the church.

From December 1975 -- till November 1984 Pastor Zwieg served in the older building. Pastor Zwieg was the first pastor to reside at the site of the new church. All the pastors before him lived far away. They built a parsonage for Pastor Zwieg in 1975. At the present he now serves in the new building. Pastor Zwieg has served for over 20 years at Immanuel. The greatest blessing he has enjoyed was that he could serve his congregation with both Law and Gospel. Another blessing that he enjoys is that he is very close to his members. God has enabled him to give them all the joys of what Christ has done for them, as well as comfort in times of sorrow.

## **What's ahead for the future.**

Plans in the future will consist of replacing the roof. This will be done in a number of years from now. They don't know exactly when they will do it, but it will be done at the proper time.

Immanuel also supports students that go to Trinity or Martin Luther Grade school by busing. Since 1988 they have been a member of the federation for Fox Valley Lutheran and support the kids that go there financially as well.

## **Conclusion**

**Doing this paper for me was quite an educational experience. I learned about what it takes to start a church and how to go about doing it. This was the goal that I had set out to do in this paper and I feel that I have learned a great deal. The most important thing I learned, was how Immanuel Lutheran Church has been blessed by our Triune God for over 123 years. Christians have enjoyed receiving the means of grace, pastors have delivered Law and Gospel, and Christ's kingdom has been extended. To this we thank and praise our Lord for all he has done for this congregation. With God's Word as their guide, they will continue to strive forward, proclaiming His Word, and growing spiritually. As far as Pastor Zwieg is concerned, only the Lord knows what other wonderful things God has planned for this congregation's future.**

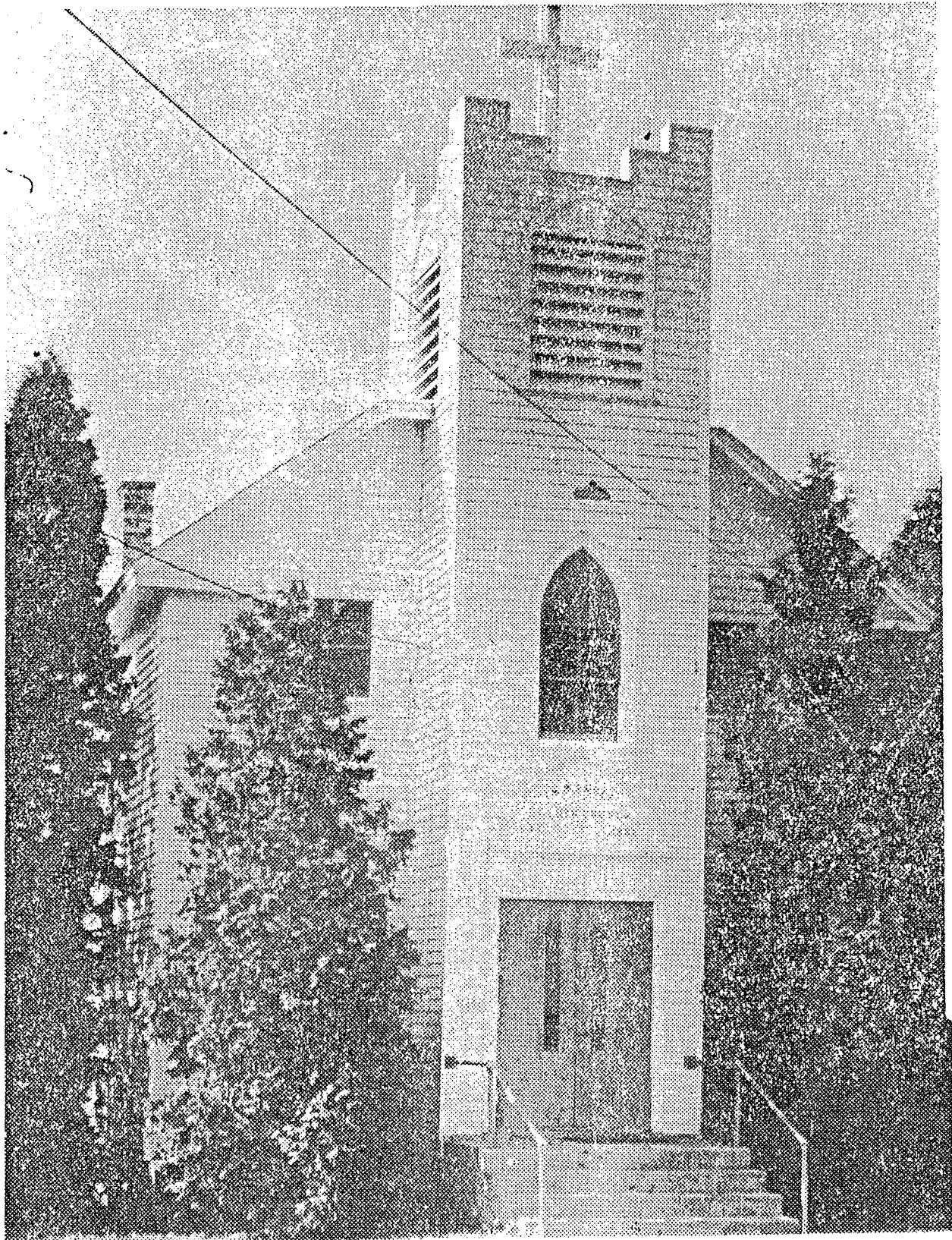
## **Bibliography**

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**All information that I received was provided by an interview of Pastor Dale Zwieg. You can reach him at 414-836-2152 if you have any questions.**

### **Pictures**

- 1. The first church building**
- 2. The second church building**

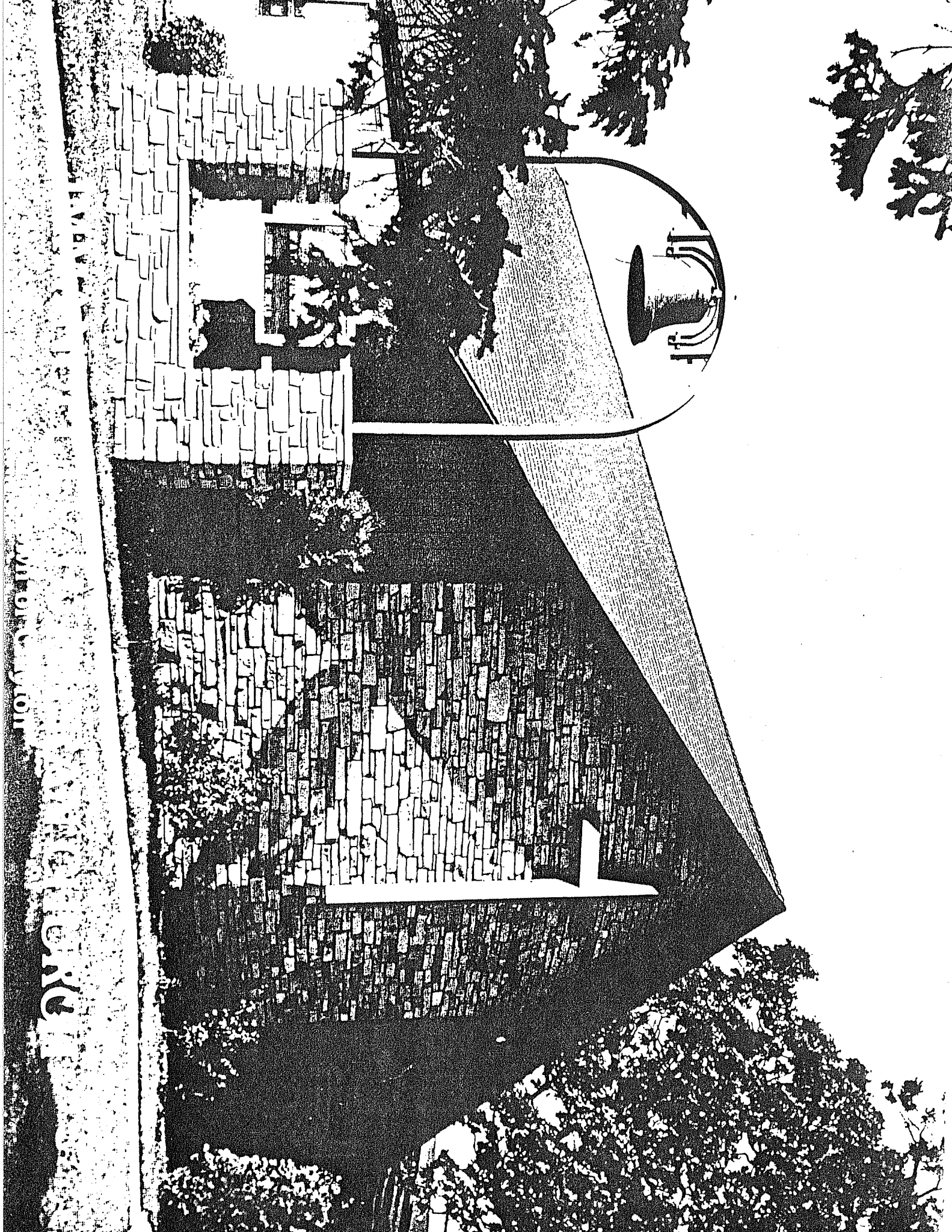


### Centennial observance

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Town of Clayton, will celebrate the centennial of its organization with special services on Sunday. The Rev. Orvin Sommer, a former pastor, will be guest

speaker for the festival afternoon service, to be followed by a supper for members of the congregation. The Rev. Ronald Kaiser is currently serving as pastor.

—Neenah-Menasha  
Northwestern Photo



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