

AXTELL REPO BERN

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AXTELL, KANSAS 66403 AND BERN, KANSAS 66408

Dec 13, 1978

Area churches survive 130 years of change

In 1854, the Kansas Territory was established through the Kansas-Nebraska Act which repealed the Missouri Compromise and allowed area settlers to determine whether or not they would support slavery.

The next two years were filled with violence as abolitionists and pro-slavery forces fought to control the area. A constitution prohibiting slavery was adopted in 1859 marking a victory for the Free Staters. In 1861, Kansas was admitted to the Union just three months prior to the outbreak of the Civil War.

Throughout this period, settlers were moving in to the Bern area and shortly after 1860, established schools to teach the children reading so they would be able to study their Bibles.

Religious activity during these formative years was mostly Bible and



A tombstone with German inscription, as it stands today in the abandoned 2nd St. John's Churchyard

racked with an internal strife between liberal and conservative elements nicknamed the "ins" and the "outs". The "outs" eventually left to establish a church on a site that is now part of the

banded in 1906 or 1907. Both churches left cemeteries at their abandoned sites.

Due to a national merging of the evangelical churches in 1957, Friedens has since become known as the Friedens United Church of Christ.

Also in 1892, the forementioned Sunday School class in Bern, then chartered as the Bern Evangelical Church, moved out of members' homes and into their new building on the site now housing the Bern Methodist Church.

Two years later, the 'Four-Mile' community changed its charter to the Reform Church of the United States. In 1894, they built the Salem Reform Church on the site now known as the Four-Mile Evangelical and Reform Church approximately four miles north of Bern.

Swiss immigrants had long settled in the area southeast of Bern and, in 1880, filed a charter at the county courthouse for the purpose of "worshiping God, and spreading the Christian religion and principals of truth, brotherhood, and integrity."

They too met in members' homes for the next fifteen years when they built a 42' x 64' assembly hall immediately south of the present site of the Apostolic Church southeast of Bern. A Sunday School building beside the church was used during the winter to teach the children German.

In 1899, the Highland Kansas Presbytery took time off from managing their Iowa, Sac, & Fox Indian Mission to accept an invitation to help found a Presbyterian charter in Bern. An organizational meeting was held at the District #92 schoolhouse and one year later



Presbyterian Church, once located east of the current home of the Robert Cicigol family.

prayer meetings held in cabins or in the shade of the massive Cottonwood trees.

There was little in the way of a formalized church until 1867 when the missionaries regularly preaching at the Four Mile settlement sought to establish a Sunday School in the settlement known as Bern.

Two years later, baptisms were recorded by a separate sect that had started two German Evangelical Churches: St. Peter's Church was located near the Kansas-Nebraska border and St. John's located two miles north and 1.7 miles east and 1/4 mile south of the highway 71 and 63 junction. Both churches were built out of rock and had small parsonages attached.

Byron Lear farm, midway between Bern and Highway 63. The churches became known as the first and Second St. John's Evangelical Churches.

The First St. John's Evangelical Church had disbanded by 1883, but members had linked up with their cohorts at the



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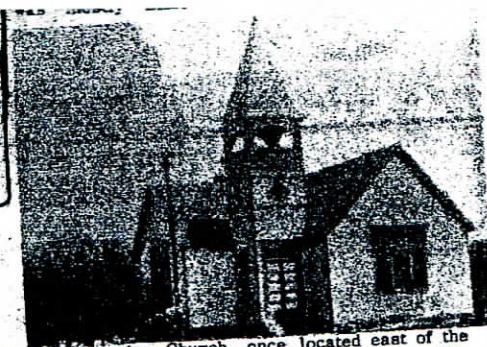
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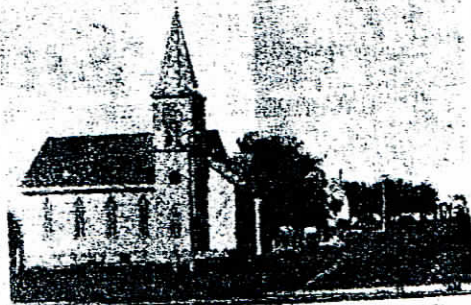
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In the early 1870's the church members in the Four Mile community decided to hold their meetings in area schoolhouses instead of their homes. They chartered themselves the German Evangelical Church Society in 1880, but continued to meet in the schoolhouses.

In 1876, the same year as Custer's defeat at the Little Big Horn, St. John's Evangelical Church was

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Evangelical Church destroyed in the 1918 tornado.

St. Peters Church in Nebraska. In 1892 they agreed to build a church of equal distance from both congregations and built the Freidens Evangelical Church approximately 2 1/2 miles north of the highway 71 and 63 junction.

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a building was purchased from the Seven Day Adventists and moved to a location, now a vacant lot across the street east from the Robert Cicigol residence.

Worshippers in the Bern area felt secure in their churches as they

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Apostolic Christian Church, 1902

1892 charter?

1880 charter

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CHURCHES (Cont. on page 1)

met the 20th Century and found their country involved in World War I.

On May 26, 1918, a tornado swept through Bern and destroyed many of its buildings including the District #92 schoolhouse and the Bern Evangelical Church. Church members began meeting in the town's new brick school building and the opera house. Construction of a new church began almost immediately and was completed at a cost of \$11,000.

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By 1968 the church had merged with the Methodists and the congregation overwhelmingly agreed to build another new building. Apparently, the 1918 construction effort used the foundation

built in 1892 which was beginning to weaken.

Consecration ceremonies were held for the new United Methodist Church on September 28, 1969.

The Apostolic Christians, at this time, were also working towards replacing their older building and in 1971 completed work on their new building. Dedication ceremonies were held May 14, 1972.

Today, almost 130 years after circuit preachers were spreading the Gospel under the Cottonwood trees near 'Four Mile', the Bern area is served by four beautiful and well maintained churches: Apostolic Christian Church, Four-Mile Evangelical and Reform Church, United Methodist Church, and the Friedan's United Church of Christ.

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