

MARKING TIME AT REDEEMER – THE FIRST DECADE

As we prepare to commemorate Redeemer's 125th anniversary in 2015, it's important to reflect on our history. I've always been interested in Redeemer's history because it is unique, I think, among the many Lutheran congregations in the Twin Cities. Over the next several months I will be summarizing that unique history in this column and putting it into context with what else was happening in Minnesota and the world beyond.

1888:

- Grover Cleveland, incumbent U.S. President, won the popular election in November but lost the Electoral College. The National Geographic Society was founded. Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh cut off the lower part of his left ear.
- St. Paul was both a national railroad hub and the place where steam navigation began on the Mississippi River.
- A group of German Lutheran pastors in St. Paul decided that the children of German immigrants should be taught their parents' faith in the English language. The first service, which would lead to the formation of The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, was held on Reformation Day 1888 at the *Evangelisch Lutherish St. Johannis Geminde* in St. Paul's Lower Landing neighborhood, 8th and Locust Streets. Rev. C. Gausewitz, pastor of St. John's, told those gathered that they were undertaking "this English Work" ... "Because we have the everlasting Gospel, and because this Gospel is to be preached by us to every nationality, kindred, tongue and people of our country."

1890:

- The United Mine Workers of America and the National Afro-American League were formed. The Wounded Knee Massacre resulted in the killing of 153 Lakota and 25 U.S. troops. Ho Chi Minh and Groucho Marx were born and peanut butter was invented.
- Minnesota was the national leader in wheat production. In St. Paul, the Twin City Railway Company had an electric streetcar line on Grand Avenue and in Minneapolis the University of Wisconsin and Minnesota football teams played their first game on November 15th.
- After two years of evening services in English, a few persons met on January 8, 1890 to organize "The English Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, St. Paul, Minnesota." Seven men signed the constitution and five of these went on to establish the congregation. Redeemer's first pastor, Rev. J. A. Detzer, was installed on September 7, 1890. At this time Redeemer's membership included only five voting and 11 communicant members. The congregation joined the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, later known as the English District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

1891:

- Liliuokalani was proclaimed Queen of Hawaii and the Wrigley Company was founded in Chicago.
- Itasca State Park was established by the Minnesota Legislature; it was Minnesota's first state park and is the second oldest state park in the U.S. Minnesota's first governor, Henry H. Sibley, died and Floyd B. Olson, governor in 1931-1936, was born.
- Redeemer was legally incorporated on July 14, 1891 and, less than two weeks later, purchased the First Presbyterian Church at the corner of Lafayette and Woodward Avenues and dedicated it on July 26th. The Laides' Aid Society soon formed on October 26, 1891 with 7 members. By 1895 there were 17 voting and 78 communicant members and 196 "souls." The Sunday School grew from only 2 children in 1890 to 100 in 1895 with 12 teachers.

Nonetheless, Redeemer's growth, by today's standards, was slow, given the exponential growth in St. Paul's population. In 1900, Germans, Swedes, and Norwegians – no doubt many of them Lutheran -- made up two-thirds of Minnesota's immigrant population. Like today's immigrants, the vast majority preferred to worship in their immigrant languages. It took courage and a clear vision for evangelical witness that enabled 1 pastor and 5 men to begin what is said to have been the first English-language Lutheran congregation west of Chicago. Thanks be to God!



Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Lafayette & Woodward, St. Paul, MN