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Lutherans To Mark Century Plus 15

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If First Lutheran Church decides to move again, it's a safe bet that it won't be toward the south.

Since its founding more than 100 years ago, the church has moved steadily northward to its present location, 1207 North Broadway.

First Lutheran will celebrate its 115th year at a covered-dish supper 6:30 p.m. Friday. The church was created Oct. 12, 1869, at a meeting of about 20 Lutherans in Peter Kern's Hall at No. 7 Market Square.

The Rev. John Heckel, who had come to Knoxville from Mendota, Ill., organized the group, and he was chosen to be the first pastor.

Heckel immediately began holding services, in a building one block north and several blocks east of the site of the signing of the church constitution — the old Hampden-Sydney Academy at the corner of Commerce and State Streets.

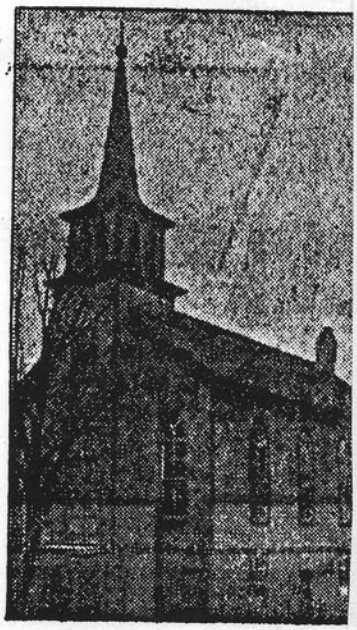
A few months later — January 1870 — a contract was let to M.B. Fahnenstock & Co. to build a church for the small congregation. The site was at the corner of Broad and Asylum Streets — now Broadway and Western Avenue.

By June of that year, the church basement was completed, so the congregation began meeting there, and, true to Lutheran tradition, a school was begun.

"If anything is particularly indicative of the Lutherans, it would be the emphasis on education," says church member Herb Hunze.

Four months later, the church was completed, and on Sept. 25, 1870, it was dedicated. By the end of the next year it was paid for — the entire sum of $5,000 being raised from member contributions.

The congregation was all of German heritage, and the services were conducted in German. That practice continued into the 1890s, when it was decided to begin regular English services, also.



The original church buildin First Lutheran Church.

Heckel had by then gone on to ther church and had been re- ed by a series of ministers, the . J.G. Schaid, the Rev. J.R. ritzen and the Rev. J. Friedrich. Under Friedrich, the congrega- grew to 172 communicants.

It was Friedrich who began the ades of work with the deaf ch has become a continuing istry at First Lutheran. The first vices for the deaf were held in church in November of 1897.

In 1901, another new minister e to First Lutheran — the Rev. liam Brand. By then, the congre- on had outgrown the small rch, so it was sold. Again, the gregation moved northward.

Property was purchased at the ner of Fifth Avenue and Broad- (site of a First Tennessee bank); by March 20, 1904, the new rch, a much more ornate one the first, was completed.

The church was then being ed by another minister — the . Ed Koehler. He stayed until , when he was replaced by the . C.V. Fricke.

The next several years saw a d succession of ministers at the rch. Fricke, who decided to re- to his original congregation in ois, was replaced briefly by the . C.L. Mueller, who in turn ded in 1916 to the Rev. H. Kellerman of St. Louis. In 1918 Kellerman was replaced by the Rev. K. Kretschmar of Hastings, Neb., who served the church until 1923.

In that year, the Rev. W.C. Krueger came to the church from Fort Smith, Ark. He stayed until 1942, when he left to serve the Institutional Ministry in Memphis.

The Rev. Roland Frerking came from Joplin, Mo., in 1943, and three years later, the growing congregation again decided a larger church was needed. Another move was made, again to the north.

The Francis house, at the corner of Broadway and Wells Avenue, was purchased, and services were held in the house until the school building was completed in June of 1947. The school doubled as a house of worship for eight years, until completion of the present church, dedicated in May of 1955.

Carol Roseberry, church member and teacher in the school, well remembers a childhood scare she had, exploring the then new church.

"In the old church on Broadway, there was a very ornate statue of Christ over the altar. When the new church was built, it was decided that the statue was too ornate for the modern decor, so it was stored downstairs in the boiler room.

"I was rambling around there one day — when I really should have been somewhere else — and I came upon that statue. I'll never forget how scared I was — I scooted back to where I belonged, *fast!!*"

Not long after, the ceramic statue, which was beginning to suffer from lack of care, was taken under the protective wing of member Gertrude Tauscher. "Gertie took it and buried it on the grounds here," Carol tells.

Under Frerking, First Lutheran's congregation swelled to nearly 500. Rather than move to larger quarters again, the group decided to establish a "daughter" congregation. In June 1958, Grace Lutheran Church in Bearden was born; 43 adults and 31 children from First Lutheran joined the new church.

The Rev. D.D. Dautenhahn had replaced Frerking by 1958 and was himself replaced by the Rev. Harry D. Smith in 1963. Under Smith's tenure, the Lutheran Center at UT, where services for the deaf are held, was begun.

Another daughter congregation, Christus Victor on Central Avenue Pike, was organized in 1967, and a third, Holy Trinity, was formed in Seymour in 1984.

Today, First Lutheran's congregation stands at 443. The school has an enrollment of 243 students, from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade.

The Rev. John Schulz, current pastor at First Lutheran, came to his post here from Houston, Texas, in January 1981.