

COVENANT LUTHERAN CHURCH

A Brief History

Covenant Lutheran Church is the result of a merger of two churches in 1980.

As the stone above the main entry states, Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized in December of 1843, but it had earlier roots in the area. Salem church was founded around 1819 and located out on Heck Hill Road, at what is now the Spring Grove Cemetery. There was a split in that congregation in 1843, with the pastor, George Klapp, and those members who wanted Sunday School and a more revivalistic approach moving to St. Paris. A few years later, they also switched to preaching in English, another controversial matter among the German settlers. The first church building was a frame building at the "Lutheran Cemetery" at the north edge of town. In 1854, a brick building was built on the present site, to be replaced by the present building in 1882. This was enlarged by the addition of class and meeting rooms in 1965. The Evans-Purk Fellowship Center, next door, was built by the members in 1997, after the church basement was flooded a couple of times.

The other predecessor church was Zerckel Evangelical Lutheran Church, organized just east of Thackery in 1846, at the instigation of Abraham Zerckel. A frame building was built almost immediately, which served the congregation till 1900. The new church built that year was located in Thackery and stood till after the merger in 1980. During most of the existence of Zion and Zerckel churches, they were served by the same pastor.

The first organ in this building of which we have a record was a pipe organ, installed around 1910, at the cost of \$1500, half of which was donated by Andrew Carnegie. Ralph Klapp, a member who died a year ago at the age of 105, used to tell of being asked, as a small teenager, to climb through a window to open the church for various organists in town who wanted to try the new organ! In the early years, after ringing the church bell, the sexton had to go up front and begin pumping the organ by hand - the bellows was later electrified. By the 1950s, the pipe organ had deteriorated enough that it was removed and replaced by a Baldwin electronic organ. When that organ proved unsatisfactory, the present one was purchased and installed in 1982. It is a Rodgers Alexandria 820, two-manual organ, with pedals, with speakers up above.