

The History of Zion Lutheran Church - Walburg, Texas

Wendish families from Lusatia, near the border of the Czech Republic and Poland, began arriving in Texas in 1849, followed by a group of 35 in 1853. On December 14, 1854 a congregation of over 500 Wends arrived in Galveston, Texas on a chartered sailing ship, the Ben Nevis. These Sorbs found the religious policy of their homeland unacceptable and added this cause to their list of reasons for leaving. From Galveston, the Wends journeyed to Houston and then on to New Ulm, the settling place of the 1853 Wends. When the group's religious leader, Reverend John Kilian arrived in New Ulm he found the farms of the 1853 Sorbs full and traveled 40 miles to Rabbs Creek. It is in this vicinity that a new homeland was founded. Over 4,254 acres of land was purchased in present day Lee County and the Wends named their town Serbin in 1860.¹

The Kilian congregation had never been purely Wendish, because a few of the Ben Nevis migrants were married to Germans. More Germans migrated in 1861 and by 1869, 88 of the 581 congregation members were from all German households or from mixed German-Wend families.²

In the late 1870's these immigrants of German-Wendish descent began migrating from Serbin toward the northeastern part of Williamson County, in what would become known as Walburg.³ The need to establish a place of worship, a school for their children, homes for their pastors and teachers, and land for a cemetery was primary and in May of 1882, in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Johann Neitsch, Reverend J.H. Maisch, together with nine charter members, organized Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church at Concordia (Walburg), Williamson County, Texas. A constitution was drawn up and adopted by the nine charter members. The nine charter members are as follows: John Schulze, Carl Streich, August Doehre, Albert Ramm, Albert Krause, Andreas Schneider, Wilhelm Andres, John Neitsch, and Jacob Schomber.⁴ Of the nine charter members, only Johann Neitsch and Johann Schulze were from the 1854 group of Wends that arrived with Reverend Kilian on the Ben Nevis.⁵

A decision was made at the first meeting to build a church and parsonage.

Twenty-five acres of land at \$2.43 per acre was purchased from Mr. Victor Schmidt on which to build a church and on September 13, 1882 the church, measuring 20 feet wide, 30 feet long, and 10 feet high, was dedicated to the Glory of God.⁶

¹ R. George Nielsen, *In Search of a Home: Nineteenth-Century Wendish Immigration* (College Station, Texas, Texas A & M University Press, 1989) 72-78

² *ibid*, 97

³ *ibid*, 110

⁴ Zion Lutheran Church History Committee of 1982, *Lift High the Cross 1882-1982* (Walburg,

Williamson County Deed Records, Office of the County Clerk, Georgetown, Texas

Reverend J.H. Maisch and P. Klindworth preached for the occasion and Reverend Maisch was installed as pastor of the congregation.

Also at this time, an on-site cemetery was established. The first recorded burial was on September 22, 1882. The Zion cemetery, located south of the church, currently contains approximately 558 marked graves.⁷

Reverend Maisch served as Zion's first pastor from May 1882 until 1883, when he accepted a call to the Lutheran Orphan's Home in New Orleans, Louisiana. Reverend L. Ernst was called and installed on December 10, 1883 and served in that capacity until December 12, 1888, when he accepted a call to the congregation at Lincoln, Texas.

The congregation was left vacant from Christmas 1888 until October 1890. One call after another was sent out during that time, but to no avail. In the fall of 1890, Reverend J.H. Sieck was called. He accepted the call and was installed by Reverend G. Buchschacher on October 12, 1890.

He served as pastor and sole educator of Zion Lutheran School until 1906, at which time Mr. Gustov Meyer from Missouri accompanied him. In the summer of 1935 Pastor Sieck turned in his resignation, effective September 1st. Pastor Sieck died in August of 1936 and is buried with his wife in Zion's cemetery.

It became apparent the church building was becoming too small to accommodate the growing congregation and in April of 1892 the decision was made to add on a 14-foot addition to the church. On June 2, 1892 the enlarged church was dedicated to the service of the Triune God.

The enlarged church soon became too small for the number of worshipers and in 1900 it was resolved to build a new church, if enough pledges could be secured. By January 6, 1901 \$1,500.00 had been pledged and with glad hearts the decision to move forward with the new church had been made. On April 21, 1901 the cornerstone was laid and on September 1, 1901 the 32'x60'x20' church with a 70' tower was dedicated to the service of the Lord. Also, in 1901, the old church was torn down and the lumber used to build a schoolhouse.

Zion Lutheran Church celebrated its 60th Anniversary on May 17, 1942.

In 1947 the congregation bought surplus army buildings from Camp Swift near Bastrop, Texas. The lumber from approximately five barracks/recreational halls

was used to build a new school. Because there was ample supply of lumber remaining, the decision was made to add a gymnasium and lunchroom. Mr. Otto Lange from Bartlett, Texas was hired as the builder. ⁹

Zion Lutheran Church Cemetery Records

⁸ Zion Lutheran Church History Committee of 1982, 4-7

⁹ *ibid*, 18, 29

Zion Lutheran Church celebrated its 70th Anniversary in 1952.

The congregation found the old church to be too small to accommodate the ever-growing membership and the decision was made to build a new church. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the new church took place on May 29, 1955. The cornerstone was laid on November 6th and on April 8, 1956 the new church measuring 45' x106' x10' and seating 550 persons was dedicated to the Glory of God. ¹⁰

Wurstbraten (German for sausage fry) is an annual sausage supper held at Zion on the first Monday in November since it's beginning in 1971.

Festivities begin the Saturday prior to Wurstbraten, when Zion members and guests of all ages gather at dawn to begin the sausage-making process. Long hours of preparing casings; cutting, weighing, and grinding meat; and stuffing and smoking sausage continue throughout the weekend and culminates on Monday with a delicious meal of sausage, side dishes, homemade bread, and desserts.

The event began as a fundraiser to raise money for floor covering and has become so popular that over 4,000 meals are served each year. This growth not only provides funds for Zion's special needs, but it enables Zion Lutheran Church to make donations to the surrounding community as well.

Zion Lutheran Church celebrated its 100th Anniversary on June 27, 1982.

The history of Zion Lutheran Church and School was compiled by Karen B. Lange of Georgetown, Texas in 2005/2006.

A historical application is pending.

Bibliography

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