

## Chapter 1: Origin- Early Times and Faces (1837-1860)

It is important to understand what our church forbearers found when they arrived in Iowa City. We can better appreciate what we have today by knowing what they had (or did not have) then.

Iowa was part of the Wisconsin Territory until an act of Congress admitted Iowa as a sovereign state in the American Union on December 28, 1846. Johnson County had been created by an act of the Territorial Legislature of Wisconsin approved December 21, 1837 and organized by passage at a special session held at Burlington, Iowa in June of 1838 with the organization to date from July 4, 1838. A temporary county seat was designated to exist at Napoleon, a small settlement on the Iowa River two miles south of the future Iowa City.

An old settler spoke of the trials of those days:

Well do the Old Settlers of Iowa (residents of Iowa before January 1, 1843) remember the days from the first settlement of 1840. Those were days of sadness and distress. The endearments of home in another land had been broken up; and all that was hallowed on earth, the home of childhood and the scenes of youth, we severed; and we sat down by the gentle waters of our noble river and often 'hung our harps on the willows'.

In 1843, another settler wrote: "Nearly all were in debt, and the Sheriff and Constable, with legal processes, were common visitors at almost every man's door. These were indeed the times that tried men's souls."

The first book published in regard to Iowa was compiled by John B. Newhall. Entitled "Sketches of Iowa, or the Emigrant's Guide", written in 1840, it was published in 1841 by J.H. Colton, the great map publisher of New York. Newhall had the following comments about Johnson County and Iowa City: "This country borders upon Indian country (to the west).....and contains an area of about 610 square miles." He discusses the land, terming it well watered and timbered. He notes that Iowa City, by then the established seat of government, had "directed the attention of hundreds of enterprising and industrious emigrants". He gives credit to the excellent clay for bricks, the limestone and bird's eye marble quarries, and the "Big Woods" to the north of the city.

To this area came the founders of our church, to lands on the wilderness frontier, hunting-grounds of the Indians, who still had a village south of Iowa City, presided over by Chief Poweshiek. As the settlers continued to arrive in droves, the Indians would soon leave to travel north and west to lands set aside as reservation areas. A speech made by Chief Poweshiek at a Fourth of July celebration in 1838 at John Gilbert's trading house at Napoleon is worthy of mention. The Chief's words were translated by A. Stephens, who had explained to the Indians the importance of the date to their white brothers and why it was always to be remembered. After hearing the explanation of independence and the right to freedom, Poweshiek is said to have risen 'to his full Indian height, and slipping his blanket from his shoulders, he raised his hand aloft'. Pointing to the westward he said,

Soon I shall go to a new home and you will plant corn where my dead sleep. Our towns, the paths we have made, and the flowers we love will soon be yours. I have

moved many times and have seen the white man put his feet into the tracks of the Indian and make the earth into fields and gardens. I know that I must go away and you will be so glad when I am gone that you will soon forget that the meat and the lodge-fire of the Indian have been forever free to the stranger, and at all times he has asked for what he has fought for, the right to be free.

The founders of Zion Lutheran Church came to “I-o-w-a”, the “beautiful land” of the Indians. The journey from the east took weeks, often months, depending on weather conditions, the mode of travel and the accuracy of the maps used for the journey. Driving their stock before them, their possessions loaded into wagons, they came to build their log cabins and put in their first crops. The area abounded in game and the river teemed with fish. The soil was fertile and they prospered. Faith, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”, led them safely to their “promised land”. Their faces must have glowed with gratitude and joy as they knelt in prayer, the long difficult journey behind them, the Father of Waters (the Mississippi River) safely crossed, their final destination reached, their futures and the future of our Zion before them.

Their homes built, crops planted and claims filed to protect their new beginnings, the German Lutherans of the area turned their thoughts to religion. All agreed that the next project for their well being was to obtain land and build a church. Their efforts are to be applauded in collecting the needed cash for a “Kirche” undaunted by the problems of language differences, the absence of our modern transportation and communication system and the scarcity of financial wealth. Eleven names appear on the agreement and these “early faces of Zion” collected sufficient funds to purchase a lot. August 6, 1856, the agreement was signed by the following:

Frederick G. Ealy	Balzer Hormel
Michael Boarts	Johannes Kneisel
D.W. Cohick	Heinrich Nicking
John C. Hormel	Julius Weinecke
George Fictor	Peter Long
Frederick Blume	

Unfortunately the English and German speaking factions could not agree upon vital issues and difficulties in ideas and leadership led to the dissolution of the organizers. By mutual agreement the two factions separated and each group organized its own congregation.

The German Lutherans sought support in founding their church among their kinfolk. On March 16, 1857, the First German Lutheran Church was organized by the Reverend Josias Ritter who had arrived in 1856. The Articles of Incorporation were signed by the following witnesses:

Josias Ritter, Pastor	Michael Protz
Johann Euler	Michael Immel
Adam Michel	Leonard Trumpp
Henry Behrens	Frederick Blume
	George Fictor

The last two names appearing in the above list were two of the signers of the 1856 agreement, proof of their German persistence. The Articles of Incorporation were filed and signed before Malcolm Murray, Justice of the Peace, on December 21, 1857.

The presence of a growing population of Lutherans in Iowa City is proven by the figures left for us by Pastor Ritter. During his eighteen-month pastorate, he married 11 couples, baptized 42 children, and conducted 12 burials. The following “firsts” are of interest:

August 24, 1856- first baptism was that of Elisabeth Friedriche Oestreicher

September 18, 1856- first funeral was that of Doris Kuehner

November 12, 1856- first couple joined in wedlock were Wilhelm Buck and Barbara Baer

Early in 1858, Pastor Ritter left to accept another position and for over a year no pastor was available. Due to the lack of leadership the second attempt at establishing a German Lutheran church failed and the group disbanded. Some members, choosing not to wait for a third attempt, affiliated with the German Methodist Church in Iowa City located to the north of the present Iowa State Historical Society Building on Gilbert Street. The Reverend J. A. List of Waverly made several missionary trips to the area but was unable to obtain a permanent pastor for the unaffiliated group.

In 1859, a German Lutheran pastor from Rock Island heard of the plight of the “unserved flock” in Iowa City. The Reverend A. Selle made arrangements to travel here and provide services every other Sunday. Considering the distance, the road conditions and Iowa weather, this must have been a true labor of love. Following the winter season, on March 20, 1859, Pastor Selle advised the area German Lutherans to try organizing once again. The third time was the charm. A story passed down in several families has it that “the Lord had tested us, found us truly faithful, so that after three attempts which represented the Holy Trinity, He blessed our efforts and Zion was born to live and endure.” On April 10, 1859, a total of twenty-one members of Zion’s Evangelical Lutheran Church signed their constitution and elected the following:

Trustees- John Ruppert, Henry Behrens, Christ Luther

Deacons- F. Ranger, Andre Hormel

Treasurer- George Fictor

Henry Behrens was one of the witnesses who signed the articles in 1857. His wishes for the success of the 1859 venture are apparent. As great, if not greater, must have been the wishes of the newly elected treasurer, George Fictor. His firm signature was on each of the three organizational papers in 1856, 1857, and 1859. As money manager of the fledgling congregation, he must have labored long and hard hours for Zion, no doubt bolstering himself many times with the fervent hope that truly the Lord would provide.

In November of 1859, the congregation received an early Christmas present in the form of the Reverend Johann Friedrich Doescher. Newly graduated from theological seminary, young Doescher arrived full of enthusiasm and an earnest desire to minister to Zion. He was welcomed by an energetic, if poor, congregation of German Lutherans who were ready and willing to work for the church. The great need was the construction of a church to house the members of Zion. The newly ordained pastor was undaunted. The locale changed from Sunday to Sunday, one week at the old third ward schoolhouse (at the NW corner of Davenport and Johnson Streets), next at the Old Capitol (then the State House), and sometimes in private homes. All agreed that the next order of business was to find a permanent home for Zion’s German Evangelical Lutheran Church. As 1860 neared, all joined in making a resolution: Zion would find a home in the new year.

## **Chapter 2: The First Church and Construction Years** (1860-1870)

On Valentine's Day in 1860 a five-member committee was appointed to find a "not too costly" lot for our church. The committee proposed the purchase of Lot #5 in Block #28 at the NE corner of Johnson and Bloomington Streets. The price was \$275 for a five-year contract at 10% interest. At a special meeting February 22, 1860, the congregation voted to purchase the lot at once.

On March 1, 1860, the committee decided to build the church 32' wide by 46' long and 18' high, facing south with two windows on the front and three windows on each side. The building started that March despite the bad weather.

The church treasury was depleted after buying the lot. Members pledged their individual time and talents, each giving as much as their income and abilities allowed. In his Year Book and Reference Annual for 1907-1908 (Appendix A) Zion's Pastor J.G. Hoerlein wrote, "Cheerfully each contributed such sums as their poverty permitted; by delegation of the congregation a Mr. John Ruppert rather unsuccessfully attempted to collect some funds in older congregations; by help of friends in the city, and by their undaunted zeal, the original structure was completed by the fall of 1861".

Some members organized "timber treks" to go into the surrounding woods to fell trees. Picnic baskets were packed; children, saws, and axes loaded on sleds and wagons, and a day was spent in the woods. Families found this outing to be pleasant breaks in the regular routine of daily hard work. The journeys to and from the woods took on a festive air. Singing in both German and English (most favorite hymns) gave birth to a church choir of "loud, if not good" vocalizers. Anyone with strong arms and the desire to participate was welcomed to the work parties. More than enough food was prepared by the ladies and was shared by all, seemingly the forerunners to Zion's famous potlucks.

Other members traveled to the limestone quarries for stones for the foundation. Iowa City had several quarries along the Iowa River, one about a mile north of Iowa City on the east bank, and three in the vicinity of Iowa City located on both sides of the river. Some went to the kilns north of Iowa City to obtain bricks for the walls. Candles were made and stored in anticipation of the first service. At the site others completed the excavation for the church basement.

The building progress was slow. In a move to speed completion of the church it was decided on August 3, 1860, to "let the laying of bricks by day work". The bricks had been hauled to the site and stacked and workers were hired to lay bricks. Bad weather slowed the building progress and the bricks were not actually used until 1861.

By Christmas of 1860 the basement walls were finished, floorboards were laid and a temporary roof of oak timbers was installed for the winter season. The first service held in the church was on Christmas Day. What a special service it was for all the members of the congregation as they gathered for the first time in the basement of their long-awaited church to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child. The warmth and joy of their accomplishment no doubt warded off the cold as the light from the homemade candles was reflected in the eyes of the happy worshippers. The beautiful old

Christmas carols sung in German were especially meaningful that day, Zion's first "Froehliche Weinachten".

The original structure was completed by the fall of 1861, and dedication services were held by the Reverend Doescher and the Reverend Weineke of Rock Island, Illinois. Church records dated early in 1862 tell us of expenditures for the original church. Nearly \$1300 had been spent with a remaining debt of \$200. An itemized list follows:

Labor	\$387.00
Lumber	\$287.04
Brick	\$275.00
Iron	\$ 71.66
Misc.	<u>\$271.74</u>
Total:	\$1292.44

In the spring of 1863 Pastor Doescher personally collected funds to build the pulpit, altar and pews. That same spring Doescher accepted a call to an Illinois congregation. Heinrich W. Wehrs succeeded him until June of 1866. At that time Reinhold R. Voigt became Zion's pastor and he remained at Zion through much of 1870.

During the early 1860's Iowa City and Zion were affected by the Civil War. The first news of impending strife came to Iowa City in January 1861. It was reported that Fort Moultrie had been abandoned and that "the flag of treason floated over United States property". Patriotism brought instant action. The Iowa City Battalion was commanded by a Major Couch. It had been formed in 1859 when three local groups joined together to form one military company. The three groups were the Washington Guards, The Iowa City Artillery Company and the Iowa City Dragoons. After the merger the artillery company was referred to as the "German Artillery". They were the proud owners of a "new brass cannon...drawn by four fine horses much admired by all observers," reports Vol. 1 of Johnson County Iowa History. The same source states that on Saturday, April 20, 1861, a mass meeting was held at the University campus: "The Washington Guards and German Artillery were out in full uniform and the artillery saluted with thirty-four guns, the national salute, at the commencement of the meeting".

Enlistment fever was at a peak, and "calls" were made daily. One of particular interest follows:

Having been requested by many of our fellow citizens to issue a call for a general rally of all citizens of this county who formerly served in European armies, we, the undersigned, call now on all these of our countrymen who fought the hirelings of tyrants in the eventful struggles of 1848 and 1849, to come forward to the rescue of our adopted country, whose laws we have sworn to support by our oath of allegiance and form a company of devoted patriots, who know well their duty to God and their adopted country. To carry out this purpose we will, after being organized, offer our services to our country for work of defense and not for show or play. Our wives and children will be taken care of by the government for the defense of whose stars and stripes we are eager to meet freedom's foe once more. The meeting will take place Wednesday, May 1, (1861) at 8 p.m. at Metropolitan Hall. Rally, ye sons of Germany, Bohemia, and France!

C.W. Lionhardt  
Henry Poggenpohl.

Camp Pope was established at Iowa City (see plaque in front of present Longfellow School) and was used as an organizational and training area before the troops were sent to the fighting zones. The ladies of all the churches were welcomed into a Ladies Aid to provide necessities, encouragement and entertainment to “the boys in blue”. The Johnson County Bible Society provided copies of the New Testament to as many troops as funds allowed. Troops were also sent to Camp Pope to recuperate from war wounds and prepare for “mustering out”. Proof that the ladies did an admirable job is evidenced in a speech given on December 17, 1862, by the colonel of the departing Fortieth Iowa Regiment, a Col. Garrett of Newton. “To the good citizens of Iowa City I tender sincere thanks for all the kindness and courtesies shown to the officers and men while in camp here. And I express special gratitude for the care of the sick by the large-hearted ladies of the city.” Old family records and stories affirm the participation and support of Zion members in the “war effort” and prayers were said in church services for the men in service and for peace. Food, bedding and other supplies were collected for “the helpless families of the absent, wounded or slain”.

Following the war years, further improvements were added as the improving economy of the area permitted. Church records for 1865 show a yearly receipts total of \$86.60, with a total of \$86.18 in expenditures leaving a balance of \$.42. When hired in 1866, Pastor Voigt was paid a salary of \$25 a month.

During 1866 two school teachers from Illinois were hired at a salary of \$30 per month plus housing. With the pastor, they taught Zion’s German-English parochial school with classes held daily from October to June. The same year the congregation purchased the adjoining property to the east of the church to accommodate the teachers. It later became the site of Zion’s first parsonage.

In 1868 Zion withdrew from affiliation with the Missouri Synod (a letter documenting the early history of Zion by the Reverend H.W. Wehrs in 1926 can be found in Appendix B). The Ladies Aid Society, the FRAUENVEREIN, was begun in 1869. Much of the growth of Zion can be attributed to the tenacious efforts and dedication of the Ladies Aid Society.



The “Bird’s Eye View” of Iowa City created by August Ruger illustrates the city layout in 1868.

Note the square structure at the corner of Bloomington and Johnson (indicated by the arrow) – Zion’s first church is shown before the narthex and bell tower were added in 1875. The apse and transept were not added until 1889

In the spring of 1869, Zion’s bell was purchased from J.G. Stuckstede and Bro. of Saint Louis, Missouri. Articles written in various histories of Zion refer to the bell as being “noted for the clearness of its tone”. The metal bell is bronze, 80% copper and 20% tin. The strike tone of the bell is F#. One side of the bell has the name of the casting company and a bible verse inscribed in German:

Cast by J.G. Stuckstede & Bro.  
 2 Timothy 2 – 8  
**HALT IM GEDACHTNISS JESUM  
 DER AUFERSTANDEN IST  
 VON DEN TOTEN**  
 (Keep in mind that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead)

The reverse side of the bell shows the date and place of casting and the name of the church:

St. Louis Mo. 1869  
**ERSTE DEUTSCHE EV. LUTH.  
 ZIONS GEMEINDE IOWA CITY, IOWA**  
 (First German Evangelical Lutheran Zions Congregation)





In Zion's Centennial brochure of October 9, 1960 it was noted that in nine more years the bell would have served Zion for a century. The following was taken from a book of old church laws and was often found on bell inscriptions describing the principal functions of a church bell:

I praise the true God;  
I call the people;  
I assemble the clergy;  
I bewail the dead;  
I disperse the storm clouds;  
I do honor the feasts.

The above was used by the Zion Centennial committee as "we take this centennial occasion to say for it (the bell) what it has done for us throughout these many years".

When the first church was demolished to enable construction of our new church the bell was put in storage. In his book Irving Weber's *IOWA CITY*, Mr. Weber writes "Iowa City seems to have been especially blessed with bells - bells with stories...exciting stories. Bells with histories almost as old as Iowa City itself". He writes the following about our Zion bell:

The Zion Lutheran Church had a bell in its original brick church which now rests at the rear of the sanctuary [sic]... The bell was cast for Zion Lutheran Church in 1869 by J.G. Stuckstede & Bro. of St. Louis. Most of the church bells in Iowa City were cast in St. Louis. When the bell was removed from the original church it was stored at William Knowling's Construction yard in the Coralville. While there, someone attempted to steal it. The weight of the bell sank the truck in about 10 inches of soft ground and the would-be thieves dumped the bell out.

When the thieves dumped it out the spokes on the bell wheel were broken. It was decided to move the 1500 pound bell to Buck Walden's warehouse at 2600 So. Riverside Drive for safety after the



robbery attempt. Buck recalls that Bill Knowling used a lowboy and an endloader to move it. He and Bill covered it and barricaded it after padlocking it to a tree. The police were alerted to its location “undercover” and they would flash their lights over the area on their nightly patrols.

Robert Moninger became involved with the bell in 1971. Pastor Richard Trost mentioned the bell at a council meeting asking its whereabouts since our insurance wouldn't cover the bell if it weren't in the church building. Bob volunteered to find it. He traced it to Buck Walden's. Apparently only Walden and Bill Knowling remembered where the bell was located.



In 1972, it was moved to John Beer's garage at 222 N. 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue by Beer, Moninger, Norm Busch and John Ernst. Moninger and Al Stieglitz set about repairing the bell. "Dutch" Laschke, an Iowa City machinist, found some antique welding rods and made a spoke for the wheel and repaired several others. The rim of the bell needed to be heated and cooled periodically for the repairs, and "Dutch" and five or six friends with blowtorches spent some twelve continuous hours completing the job. When informed that the bell belonged to Zion Lutheran and assured that it had been German, "Dutch" submitted a bill for \$6.

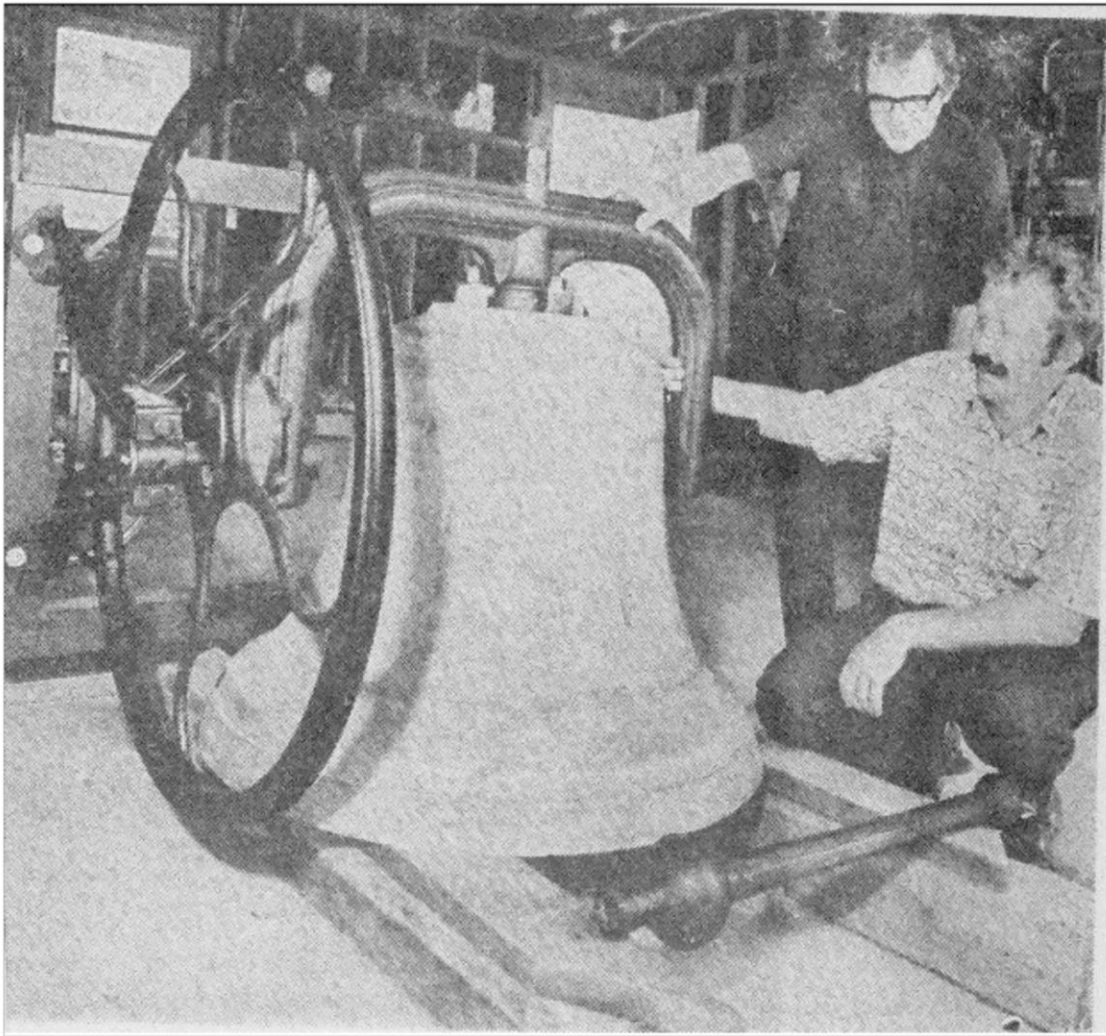


Photo from Iowa City Press-Citizen, September 2, 1972. Captioned:  
“This bell which hung for some 90 years at the Zion Lutheran Church, has been lost for some eight years after the congregation built a new church. Sunday, if plans work out, it will be back home due to the efforts of Zion Lutheran Pastor, the Rev. Richard Trost, left, and Robert O. Moninger, a parishioner, and other members of the congregation.”

Zion’s bell “came home” to reside in its present position in the narthex. The wooden stand for the bell was given by Lilah Sass and her children in memory of Carroll W. Sass, by John Ernst in memory of Myron and Erma Ernst, and by Geraldine Busse. The stand was designed by Bill Nowysc and constructed by Quentin Pitzen.