

HISTORY MINUTE

presented by Edward Spannaus

Second Sunday of Easter, April 12, 2015



The End of the U.S. Civil War

This past Thursday, the nation commemorated the end of the Civil War in the East, that being the 150th anniversary of Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender at the Appomatox Court House on April 9, 1865.

What was it like here, at New Jerusalem, during the war? We know that our congregation was bitterly divided, that its sons fought in the war on both sides, and some died.



But now we have a much fuller picture of the condition of this church, and the community, during the Civil War, due to our recent discovery of a series of letters written in late 1864 and early 1865 by our pastor, Xenophon J. Richardson, which were published in the Lutheran Observer. (At a later point, we will discuss other aspects, including our isolation, caught between the Virginia and Maryland Synods.)

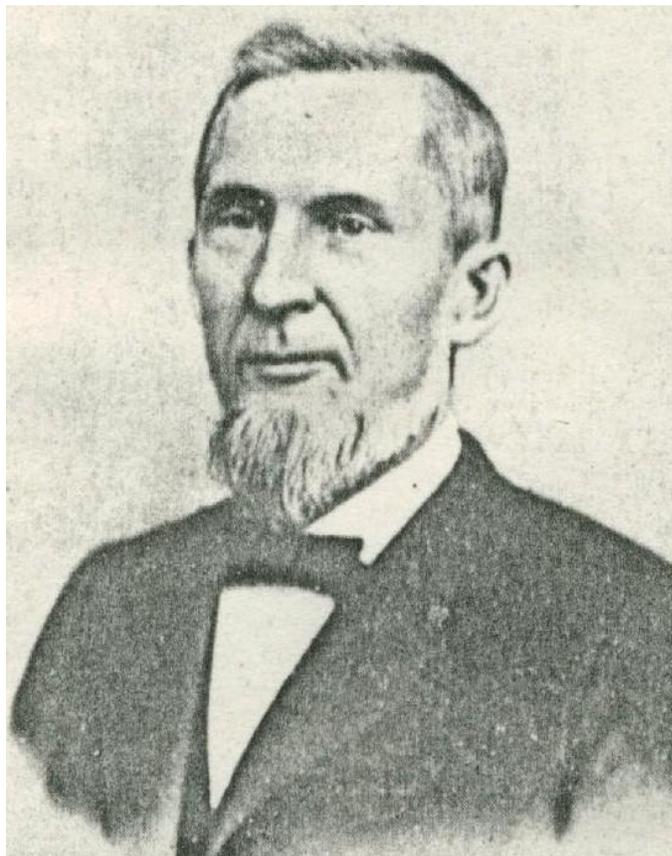
When he arrived here in early 1860, the congregation's "... condition then was not good. Various causes had operated to produce dissensions, heart burnings, and alienations." He worked to "improve the spiritual condition of the church, to remove as far as possible the causes of distraction and disaffection, and to bring back again those who had become estranged away," and, he says:

"In this I was as successful as could be expected. After some months I had a protracted meeting; the Holy Spirit was poured out upon us in copious measure, Christians were revived, sinners were

converted, and fifty members were added to the church by confirmation. The influence of this season of grace upon the church was of the most happy character. It united the church as it had not been before for years, increased its moral power in the community, and gave me a hold upon the confidence and affections of my people that has been of incalculable value to me and my efforts to save the church from evil, amid the distractions of succeeding war."

"From the spring of 1861 to the fall of 1863," he wrote, "we did not deem it prudent, in consequence of military excitements and for other reasons, to open the church at all for night service," although they did maintain, as well they could, the regular schedule of Sunday services and Sunday school and catechism classes.

But, "wickedness of every description was on the increase, and demoralizing influences were become daily stronger. What was to be done?" What he did, in the winter of 1863-64, was to set up a series of clandestine prayer meetings, at member's home and school houses. The locations were changed from place to place.



"... so that all could occasionally attend, for the purpose of confessing our sins and imploring the pardoning mercy and compassion of our God. No public announcements were made of these meetings, the appointments were privately circulated among the members, and but few attended

them or knew of them except those who would go to pray. It was good to be there. The Spirit of heavenly grace descended upon us. Christians renewed their covenant with God, and were blessed. Then the burden of unconverted souls began to come upon us as it had not before. We prayed for them in all the earnestness of longing desire for their conversion."

This led to a series of larger meetings at the Tankerville (Bethel) School House, and at Frye's School House (Morrisonville). "The whole community seemed to become aroused, and in the course of two or three nights the school house became so crowded that we had to move away privately to another place ... the result was the conversion of more than forty souls."

Richardson wrote that "We entered upon [that] series of meetings with fear and trembling," explaining:

"This county for the past two or three years has been neutral ground—neither army holding it, and detachments from both overrunning it. We feared interruptions by soldiers, but, to their credit, and the praise of God's restraining grace, let it be said, they caused us no trouble. We feared collisions between opposing parties, but though we had both occasionally, providentially they never met at any of our meetings."

He described the situation of the churches and communities along the border this way:

"We have no civil law; at least this is the case here, and I presume it is the same elsewhere. There is not a single human instrumentality in operation to protect the good and punish the wicked. Society is dissolved into its original elements, and every man, according to his own moral instincts and feelings, has become his own protector and avenger. Sometimes armies pass through, leaving destruction and desolation to mark their course; while scarcely a week elapses that we do not have scouting parties and detachments from both armies going in almost every direction. This state of things causes continued excitement and alarm, and its fearfully demoralizing tendency can only be known and appreciated by those whose lot is cast within its range. The worst passions of human nature are aroused, and every man, except where the most thoroughly tested confidence exists, is disposed to look upon his neighbor with suspicious distrust. No wonder, therefore, that we hear of neighborhoods filled with contention and strife, where mobs' will, in all their fiendish violence, and murders are the order of the day."

But in our church and in this community generally, we have had peace. The Gospel has taught us to love one another, and under the influence of that love we respect each others' rights, bear one another's burdens, and meet our mutual responsibilities.

Richardson said that the German Reformed pastor "... has remained at his post, preaching regularly to his people, who have conducted themselves peaceably and quietly as becometh the disciples of Christ." Apparently the other pastors had left, but the members of other churches "have cordially united with us in efforts to promote the peace and piety of the community."

"But this church embraces a larger portion of the population than all the rest together. Its responsibilities are, therefore, great. With these we have been greatly impressed, and have tried to meet them in the fear of God."

"Sore calamities have befallen us recently, and others still, however, may be in store for us. But hitherto the Lord hath helped us, and we will trust his mercy and grace for the future."

This last letter was published on Feb. 3, 1865. About nine weeks later, was Lee's surrender at Appomatox. At the end of May, Spring Communion was held. Pastor Richardson wrote in the church register: "For the first time in four years we met and worshipped in peace, the war cloud having passed away from us, and the war nearly ceased throughout the country. The meeting held under these circumstances was a pleasant one and we trust profitable also"