

It was a time of expansion: cities growing, farms taming the wilderness, railways crossing the country. The Iowa District of the Evangelical Church looked across the Mississippi River and saw an opening for a new church in Rock Island. Rev. P.C.F. Off, organizer of mission churches, arrived here July 5, 1895, and called on families living below the bluff. No one came to the first service. Undaunted, he tried again, and ten people worshipped together on Sunday, July 14. He had a difficult time, but on September 8, 1895, twenty-six men became charter members of this mission church, the Deutsche Evangelische Friedens Gemeinde.

Rev. Off turned over his work to Rev. F. Rasche in December. With his guidance, Sunday School was established, a Ladies' Aid Society (the Frauenverein) including a quilting circle began, and four Confirmands were added to the roll before he left in April. Members continued to meet in each other's homes.

Rev. Theo F. Krueger arrived in May, 1896 as the congregation's first permanent pastor. He stressed the importance of acquiring a church building. At the May, 1897 monthly congregational meeting, it was decided to purchase the Methodist Church on 9th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues for \$1600.

Rev. Krueger received a monthly salary of \$50. The congregation paid \$12 with the Mission Board assuming the remainder. At first, it was a happy situation of growth; but difficulties arose between Rev. Krueger and the congregation. He resigned in August of 1899. Rev. Dexheimer and Rev. Janke filled the pulpit as the church members faced the new century.

In April of 1900, Rev. J.F.C. Trefzer arrived. As there was no parsonage, the Ladies' Aid purchased property adjacent to the church, and contracted with Heidemann and Schroeder for \$1590 to erect a home. After awhile, difficulties arose between Pastor Trefzer and the congregation. Members "held themselves aloof from the work of the church, others withdrew altogether, and again others refused to meet their financial obligations to the church". At a special congregational meeting in January of 1903, Pastor Trefzer resigned. Young Mrs. Emma Kann, president of the Ladies' Aid, was aghast. Her group still held the debt for the now-empty parsonage. The church itself was still in debt. The Church of Peace was having a rocky start in Rock Island!

During this unsettling time, a strong leader emerged from within the congregation, Mrs. Emma Kann as the president of the Ladies' Aid. She inspired hard work from the congregation to keep going, and to raise money to cover the indebtedness. Rev. Ed E. Klimpke from Aurora arrived as pastor. The congregation responded well to him. The church was raised five feet to add a basement, and a Muscatine church donated their old organ. Then Rev. Klimpke resigned in 1908 to become the pastor in Des Plaines.

The president of the Iowa Synod encouraged Rev. Frederick Rolf to accept the call from the Church of Peace. The understanding was that the work in Rock Island would be dropped if it could not yield better results. Rev. Rolf decided to accept the challenge, declining a call from Marietta, OH. As he and his wife, Martha, began their work, they realized two factors kept the

church from growing. One had been the constant change of pastors. The second was the limiting size of the church building. It was so small that the kitchen was in the coal room!

In 1911, Rev. Rolf requested a change of location. In 1912, he tried again. This time it was approved to sell the old church to the B'nair Brith organization for \$3000, and two lots were purchased on Twelfth Street. The parsonage was moved to the new location. The pews and other furniture went into storage. The congregation met in the old YMCA on 19th Street and 3rd Avenue during construction.

And what a construction it was! Highly regarded George P. Stauduhar was retained as the architect. Included in his many local designs are the Villa de Chantal, Sacred Heart and St. Joseph's Churches, and the Potter, Wagner, Looney, and Kelly homes in Rock Island. His work spanned from North Dakota to Pennsylvania. He chose an unusual style, Byzantine Revival, for the Friedenskirche, with rounded arches and a domed ceiling. The building was built of yellow Black Hawk pressed brick with outside dimensions of 50' by 76'. Henry Tappendorf of Rock Island was the contractor.

The main auditorium (sanctuary) was 40' square, with a balcony on the east side and a choir loft on the west side. The pastor's study was on one side of the loft, and the choir room on the other. In the basement were a bathroom and cloakrooms, a large Sunday School room with a raised platform, a room for the Ladies Sewing Society, and a neatly equipped kitchen. Seating capacity was 400. The John J. Kinsella Company of Chicago designed the stained glass windows for the sanctuary. Their work had been described as the best in Chicago, and was created in the Tiffany style. The "Christ Knocking at the Door" window was given by Carl Krueger, a loyal member who served the board as secretary for 25 years. "Christ in the Garden" was given by the Sunday School, and other smaller windows were also donated.

The old pipe organ was installed pending the arrival of a new tracker action organ purchased from the Hinners Company in Pekin, IL. Rev. Rolf's brother, William, was a superintendent there.

The new church was dedicated the Sunday after Easter, March 30th, 1913. Dr. Jacob Pister of Cincinnati, president of the Evangelical Synod of North America, was the guest speaker in German at the 10:30 am service. At a 2:30 pm service, Rev. F. Werner of Lowdon, IA spoke in German. Dr. W.S. Marquis of the Broadway Presbyterian Church, spoke in English. At the 7:30 pm service, former ministers Rev. Klimpke, now from Bloomington, and Rev. Trefzer from Franklin, IA spoke. Also participating was Rev. Rudolph Stave of Muscatine and 60 members of his congregation.

The total cost of the construction was over \$25,000 with a debt of \$14,500 remaining. A small group of members assumed this debt. Would their gamble pay off? Would the church grow as Rev. Rolf predicted?

Rev. Frederick Rolf was energetic and hardworking. He began the special Easter offering which was set aside to pay off the indebtedness. Members joined, Sunday School grew, the Ladies' Aid split into two divisions—the German speaking and the English speaking. In 1917, a pictorial directory was published. In 1920, a monthly typeset newsletter debuted which was sent to all households. It states that in 1908, there were “50 voting members. Now there are 400”. In 1923, there were 1200 members including 700 communicant members and 500 contributing members. There were 376 enrolled in Sunday School with 26 teachers and helpers.

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The Church of Peace was becoming one of the biggest in Rock Island. Rev. Rolf reminded the board of their promise to build a new parsonage. After delays, Rev. Rolf threatened to leave. The board decided to think big, and envisioned a compound that included an enlargement of the church, an education building, and a new parsonage. Again, the leading architect of the city was hired—Ben Horn of Horn, Cervin, and Stuhr. He had just completed the Fort Theater (now Circa 21), and would design the new Rock Island High School.

His plan was stunning, but it was decided to proceed only with two parts. The education building would have to wait. Two more lots were purchased and work began. The dedication took place on Sunday, February 27, 1927. A special 4-page insert was added to The Argus. It describes the 36' addition to the west side of the sanctuary. “The original dome ceiling has been retained. The ceiling of the addition consists of a barrel vault intersected by small vaults at each of the five windows, these vaults being carried by a continuation of the original hammer beam trusses, giving the effect of a continuity of arches which lead up in an interesting manner to a series of consecutive arches which form the choir loft and the chancel.”

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Company of Chicago was chosen because it included “a mural of great value”. Its bid was actually in the middle of the prices at \$1900. Gustave Brand was born in Germany in 1862, and studied in Berlin and Munich with the sponsorship of the Duke of Mecklenburg. He assisted a German artist in painting the diorama of the Battle of Gettysburg. In 1893, he came to Chicago to paint murals on the German Building at the Columbian Exposition. He remained in Chicago where he was civic minded, and painted hundreds of murals.

Some murals are in the Boston Library, the Chicago Auditorium Theater, and the Carl Schurz High School in Chicago.

What was the dedication like, and what famous person gave money?

What famous person spoke? Who created a controversy?

Behind the scenes, the church board was also involved in a controversy with George Stauduhar, the architect of the original 1912 church. The new architect, Ben Horn, had used Stauduhar’s drawings to help plan the structure of the addition; and Stauduhar wanted compensation. A committee was appointed to look into the matter, and Stauduhar received the \$50 he wanted!

On Monday, February 28th, 1927, a feature story in The Argus highlighted the services. “Demonstrating the strength in the esteem of Rock Island people which has been developed by the Evangelical Church of Peace . . . members and friends thronged the edifice yesterday at the three services dedicating improvements to the church plant recently completed. Pastor Fred J. Rolf estimated 800 crowded into the auditorium at the morning and evening services, and with 600 present in the afternoon. All during the day, too, friends called at the new parsonage, two doors north of the church.”

The new \$10,000 pipe organ was also dedicated along with the surprise announcement that half of its cost was donated by Mrs. John Denkmann Hauburg (board minutes record \$4700). William Rolf, the pastor’s brother and also superintendent of construction for the Hinners Organ Company of Pekin, IL, supervised its building and installation. “The big organ represents the latest in developments: electromagnetic action, oscillating tablets for stops, radiating pedal board.” At the three services, Mr. Rolf played the organ and “displayed the instrument’s beautiful tone and versatility”. It had 31 stops and 1215 pipes.

Guest speaker at the morning service was Dr. H.R. Niebuhr, president of Elmhurst College. Described as a “deep student of theology and divinity”, he held degrees from Eden Theological Seminary and Washington University in St. Louis, and Yale Divinity School and Yale University. He spoke on the text from John 6:68, “then Peter said, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.’” After noting that some people often give what they have to secular pursuits such as the automobile and radio, or that some people fanatically follow the teachings of their sect, but maybe do not follow the teachings of Jesus, Niebuhr stated that all people have something in common. Each wonders “why I am I? Why I am here? Why I am here now? . . . A church is not necessary to worship. But the building and dedication of this church is an unmistakable sign of the persistence of the religious idea in our hearts, and the

presence of this building here is the manifestation of our inward conviction that God and His kingdom are directing our destinies.”

At the afternoon service, messages were given by Rev. John Buescher of Burlington, and Rev. C.W. Klein of Moline. Greetings were also extended by Rev. P. Thomas of Lowden, IA and Rev. Carl Fauth of Clarence, IA.

On Tuesday, March 1st, 1928 the confirmation class met in the afternoon, and a dedicatory supper was served in the evening. The basement had the capacity for seating 500 people at tables at one time. “The kitchen, one of the most conveniently planned and arranged for serving large church suppers, is 20’ square, and the distribution of the portions such as dishwashing, servicing of coffee and dessert, etc. has been arranged to eliminate confusion. As many as 25 people may work there at the same time. The equipment consists of a modern 8-burner gas range, gas water heater, special dishwashing sinks, steam table, two 19-gallon coffee urns, gas heated, and a container for ice cream freezers.

Other features included the heating of a central warm air type with a 6-inch fan motor. It also supplied fresh air in the warm months. Modern fireproof asbestos shingles were used.

On Friday evening, March 4th, a get-together meeting of the congregation and friends was held. Entertainment included the Gypsy Nomads, a male quartet, readings by Miss Elizabeth Rouse, selections by the Elks’ band of Rock Island, some vocal duets, and short talks by various members.

It had been quite the week for the Rock Island church. Among all the congratulations were some nagging thoughts by some of the planners who had dreamed of the entire plan being completed. The central Sunday School wing would have provided the connecting link from church to parsonage. It would have created an artistic green space, a distinctly “old world atmosphere” from which the “viewer would receive the impression of peacefulness and comfort which the name of the church implies.”

Would the dream come to fruition?

After the 1927 addition, the church building had doubled in size and the parsonage was built, but the education wing connecting the two units was only a dream. Its \$35,000 price tag was too much to accomplish at that time.

Rev. Rolf and church members believed it would only take a few years to raise the money for the educational wing. After all, the special Easter offerings had supplied the cash for the improvements so far. By they had not foreseen the deprivations of the Great Depression and the sacrifices in resources and human life of World War II. The year 1945 marked both the 50th anniversary of the church, and the end of the war—and it was to celebrate!

October of 1945 brought special services. Professor Purd E. Dietz of Eden Seminary spoke. A beautiful gold-toned booklet outlining the church and its history was published. It was decided

to name the educational wing the Memorial Building, and start a campaign for its completion. Two years later, the remaining \$21,000 owed on the parsonage expansion was paid off, and a mortgage burning was celebrated with Dr. Allen G. Wehrli.

In 1952, Rev. Christian H. Rohlfing accepted the call to replace the retiring Rev. Fred Rolf. Rev. Rohlfing challenged the congregation to move forward by completing the unit. Sunday School classes had been held in the parsonage and church basement and sanctuary. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held in 1955—the 60th year of the church. Willi Franck (a member of the church) supervised construction of the building whose architect was Chris Maiwald from Moline. Dedication of the \$130,000 building came the following May 21, 1956. Three services were held, and the first was held outdoors.

In 1957, the Evangelical and Reformed denominations united with the Congregationalists to form the United Church of Christ. In the midst of this active growing time, Rev. Dr. John L. Schmidt, former president of the South Illinois Synod, accepted the call to minister at the Church of Peace. In 1963, he replaced Rev. Rohlfing who moved to Franklin Park. Rev. Schmidt was among those who wrote the Statement of Faith for the United Church of Christ. Under his leadership, the debt for the Memorial Building was retired. The 70th anniversary of the church was noted with a gift from Richard Lohrens of the carving of the Last Supper, currently placed on the altar. It was made in Oberammergau, Germany.

Kenneth D. Kuenning became minister in 1969. Eden seminarians that assisted between 1967 and 1972 were Robert Schantz, Donald Reimers, Alva Hohl, Jr., David Hohmann, and Mark Stahlhut. In 1975, the congregation voted to retain its presence in the neighborhood, and continue its ministry to its neighbors. Many outreach programs, including the Community Caring Conference and Quad City Interfaith, began here. Rev. Ludwig Kutz returned to his home church in 1973 as pastoral assistant.

In 1991, Rev. Dr. Michael A. Swartz accepted the call to the Church of Peace. Under his leadership, the ministry of the Church of Peace has been more aware of serving families, near neighbors and global neighbors. As in the past, we still follow the example of Jesus Christ as seen in our beautiful mural in the sanctuary, to take care of those less fortunate.

Will the Church of Peace still stand on the corner of Twelfth and Twelfth? This story will be continued by each and every member of this congregation!