

History of St. John's Lutheran Church in Sterling
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Prior to the founding of the German Lutheran Church at Sterling, Germans living in the area likely conducted lay services in their homes. They were served only occasionally by Lutheran Missionaries and Circuit Preachers who visited periodically to conduct marriages and baptize the newborns. [Frederick Menke](#) of Tittabawassee (1852-1907) was one of these missionaries, who conducted several marriages in Sterling from 1885-1887. Pastor Menke's home church during this time was St. John's Lutheran Church in Pigeon (Berne), Michigan.

About 1875, a school building was built just northwest of the center of town. About 1883, it was expanded and additional rooms were added. By 1888, need for school space was such that a new, larger school was built. The old school building was acquired for use as the German Lutheran Church.



On September 4, 1887, the first services were conducted. **Caroline Daley**, daughter of **William Daley** and **Anna nee Fahl**, became the first child baptized in the new church. The church was known as Evangelische Lutherische St. Johannes Kirche, or, in English, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Formal incorporation was completed on November 8, 1888.

Pews were acquired in a most unusual way. Each family was to pay \$5.00 to have a pew made. Cabinet makers **John Redmond** and **John Kaschub** did the handiwork. When completed, only the family that paid for it was permitted to use it. These are the same pews that are in use today in the church.

Early pastors of the church were:

- Pastor [Richard Praetorius](#) (1855-1939), about Sept 1887 to June 1889
- Pastor **Carl Albert Harrer** (abt 1866-?), about June 1889 to June 1891
- Pastor [John Henry Westendorf](#) (1869-1922), about January 1892 to February 1892

- Pastor [Henry Abelman](#) (1845-1918), about May 1892 to October 1893
- Pastor **C. G. Wagner**, about January 1894 to March 1896
- Pastor [Frederick C. Vierke](#) (1834-1901), April 1896 to July 1899
- Pastor [Eduard E. Rupp](#) (1878-1959), October 1899 to August 1902
- Pastor [Adolph J. Clabuesch](#) (1879-1927), November 1902 to December 1907
- Pastor [John Joseph Roekle](#) (1884-1954), July 1908 to October 1910
- Pastor [Herman John Kionka](#) (1858-1920), November 1910 to May 1912
- Pastor [Theo C. Gieschen](#) (1889-1948), March 1913 to April 1918
- Pastor [Alfred F. Maas](#) (1895-1962), June 1918 to June 1920
- Pastor [Paul G. Naumann](#) (1896-1941), October 1920 to September 1923
- Pastor [Louis G. Meyer](#) (1899-1962), December 1924 to July 1930

About 1920, a new church building, which stands today, was erected.

One member of the congregation who was baptized in the church entered the ministry. **Carl Heinrich Schmelzer** was born in Sterling on January 16, 1895. He was a 1920 graduate of the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary at Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. He married **Bertha Klenk** on June 30, 1920.

Early records of the church indicate one member killed while in military service. **Richard Julius Maibouer** was born March 14, 1892. He was killed March 16, 1919 in Germany. Memorial services were conducted on April 6. His remains were returned in 1920 and buried in the Sterling Cemetery.

Virginia Adams, in her 1976 historical essay: "History of the Sterling Area, Vol. I", wrote of the German settlers who founded St. John's Lutheran Church in Sterling in 1887:

"The names of these first members of the congregation have been preserved down through the years: John Treichel, John Felske, Peter Fahl, Gottfried Hertzberg, Gustav Hertzberg, Jacob Klein, Julius Maibauer, Gottfried Marks, William Schmelzer, George Streuer, Christian Sonnenberg, Carl Templin, William Sinn, Michael Felske, Erdmann Netzlaff, John Kaschub, Louis Klein, Immanuel Klenk, and Carl Pehlke."