

Brief History of St Peter's German United Evangelical Lutheran Church at Ceres Iowa

Aka: Ceres Lutheran Church, Independence German Lutheran Church, Pioneer Rock Church

The church, originally called *St Peter's German United Evangelical Lutheran church*, is located along US highway 52, about 4 miles south of Garnavillo. The church, built in 1858 under the leadership of Rev Dr Paul Stockfeld, was built on 5.18 acres purchased from Eli Carlin for \$30 per acre near the settlement known then as Independence. Before building the church, members walked to Garnavillo to attend St. Paul's Lutheran church where Rev Stockfeld was serving.

The two-story rectangular church, 44 feet long and 30 feet wide, was built for \$1,100. It is built of cut limestone block which was quarried from the Gerhard Bierbaum rock quarry a half mile east of the church and brought to the site by ox teams. The stone wall thickness is 20". The mortar to lay the limestone blocks was made of slacked lime and sand hauled from Guttenberg. Wood was used in the gabled roof and the double-hung sash windows which have segmental arched tops. Round pole rafters support the church roof.

Twelve feet on the north end of the building on the first floor and second floor was set aside as living space for the pastor. Room dimensions on each floor were 12'6" x 26'8". There is also a small basement under the north end.

The church proper was 32 feet long. The altar was designed and built by Mr. Prior of Guttenberg for a cost of \$68.00. The benches, painted white with walnut wood color trimming, were made in Guttenberg by Caspar, Henry, and Carl Backhaus for \$2.50 each. The pulpit is suspended on the north end with steps going up to it. Deep red plush adorned the altar and pulpit. Kerosene lamps with reflectors were installed along the white walls and on the center posts. A cluster of six lamps hung from the ceiling in the center of the church. The building was heated by a large old-fashioned stove. The 19th century atmosphere is still faithfully preserved in the interior with original furnishings still present.

In 1858, a well was dug nearby by Sebastian Walsh for \$1.00 per foot to rock, then \$1.15 per foot. The well was five feet in diameter and rocked up with no mortar and was 35 feet deep. Water was drawn up by pail and rope. A pump was later installed. Later an additional acre of ground was deeded to the church by Gerhard Bierbaum.

In 1874, a church organ was purchased for \$102. In 1890 a new organ was purchased.

In 1889, the steeple tower built of wood by Louis Schroeder was added for \$300. A bell was installed for \$111.

In 1896, the settlement name of Independence was changed to Ceres. The Ceres church is now the only building remaining of that settlement known first as Independence and then Ceres.

In 1901, when a parsonage was completed in Garnavillo for the pastor then serving both the Ceres and Garnavillo St. Peter Lutheran parishes, the pastor resided in Garnavillo and school was held in the upstairs room of the church.

Around 1907, a new floor was laid in the church, new varnished ceiling installed and a frame addition that had been on the east side of the church was removed. The inside of the church was re-plastered with white gypsum plaster.

After 1919, services at the church ceased.

In 1927, the Pioneer Rock Church Association was organized to preserve the church and the cemetery property.

A barn east of the church was taken down in 1928.

A kitchen was built by Wm Piehl in 1929. The structure had a concrete floor and metal siding.

Playground equipment was installed in 1934.

An open shelter pavilion was built in 1936 by George Hill, Ed Rademacher, Fred Fehlhafer, Albert Peterson and O.H. Roebken with additional volunteer labor for a cost of \$340.

In 1948 the church was re-shingled with asbestos and the steeple was covered with copper sheet and a gold plated cross was installed at a cost of \$325.

In 1954 the highway commission established a picnic area on the grounds.

In 1977, the Ceres Church was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Ascension Day services, sponsored by Shepherd of the Hills, are currently held every year at the church.

Sources: Des Moines Sunday Register Article June 30, 1957; Application to National Register of Historic Places 1977; Historical Account prepared by Alfred Pufahl; Pioneer Rock Church Association booklet 1927.