

8. Moravian Church

Introduction

The Moravians were among the first to settle in Alberta and to establish congregations and churches. Bruderheim and Bruederfeld were organized in 1895, and in 1896 work was also begun in Heimthal. More congregations and churches were established subsequently: in Calgary (Good Shepherd Moravian Church, 1902), New Sarepta (1904), Edmonton (1905), Calgary (Christ Moravian Church, 1919), Bruce (1929–1940), Carstairs (1929–1944), Champion (1929–1944), Eigenheim (1929–1949), Didsbury (1930?–1963) and Torrington (1937–1941). Barrhead/Meadowview and Westlock at one time had Moravian congregations that met in homes. Currently there are eight congregations in Alberta: Edmonton Moravian Church, Millwoods Community Church (Edmonton), Rio Terrace Church (Edmonton), Good News Moravian Church (Sherwood Park), Good Shepherd Community Church (Calgary), Christ Moravian Church (Calgary), Bruderheim Moravian Church, and Heimtal Moravian Church.

The first Moravian immigrants arrived in the Edmonton area in May and June 1894. In 1895 the newly organized congregation in Bruderheim numbered 44 adults, 16 youths and 52 children. One month later, in today's Millwoods, the Bruederfeld Moravian Church was organized, and in 1896 Moravian work begun in Heimthal south of Edmonton. The numbers swelled quickly. The 1901 census reported 111 Moravians in Bruderheim, 37 in Josephsburg nearby, 219 in Colchester (Bruederfeld), and 59 in Heimthal for a total of 426 persons. Ten years later the Census tallied 578 Moravians, a more than 30% increase, in the same area.

Localities with Moravian members were closely knit communities, and for many years after their initial settlement in Alberta German was the language of the church and the language of the home. But as with other church groups the pressure of the English-speaking outside world slowly made its advance; adults had to interact with the surrounding world, and children went to English-language schools. Church diaries testify to the emotionally charged controversy about how to maintain German-language services for the older generation and how to introduce worship services in English for the younger generation and for outsiders without German background. The balance between the two and the accommodation of both needs and desires proved to be a huge challenge for the Moravians as it did for other faith groups, sometimes pitting the two groups against each other in sharp conflict. The 1949 church board minutes and the congregational diary of the Edmonton's Moravian Church document the conflict.

There was a vigorous and heated debate, which finally resulted in two or three members leaving the room. The pastor expressed in grief that the matter should have developed as it did. A motion was made to switch languages and have all morning services in English and all evening services in German, for a trial period of six months. ... The motion was passed with 27 in favor and five against. The pastor made a plea for peace and good will and closed the meeting with a prayer. A subsequent plan involved that all services in German be held on a Sunday and all English the next; this implied, however, that "many of our people do not understand the German very well and quite a number not at all. This means that they have services they can attend only every other Sunday, which is not enough. We want the German-speaking people to have the service in their own language every Sunday also." So a motion was subsequently put and passed (41 for and 14 against) for a plan which meant having "a German service each Sunday at 10 o'clock and an English service at 11 or 1:15 ... and having all Sunday evening services to be in English.

Eventually English replaced more and more worship services in German. As might be expected, the struggle to maintain German-language services took longer to resolve in the rural areas of the province than in the cities.

Albrecht, Charles, born in October 1880 in the U.S.; came to Canada in 1904; served as a Moravian preacher in Bruderheim, AB (September 1904–May 1912).

Anhorn, Friedrich, served the Calgary Moravian Church (November 1928–June 1932); Eigenheim, Carstairs, AB (May 28, 1929–1932); Champion, AB (June 2, 1929–1932); Bruderheim, AB (May 1932–December 1933).

Bahnmann, N. W. (Mennonite) served New Sarepta, AB (1934–1935); Bruce, AB (1935).

Befus, John, served the Edmonton/Strathcona Moravian Church, AB (1937–1938, student pastor); Calgary Moravian, AB (1948–1949); Bruderheim, AB (June 1954–June 1956); Vancouver B.C. (1960–1962).

Pastor Befus spent the first 15 years of his life in Calgary; moved to Didsbury, AB; wanted to be a farmer, but felt the call early; attended the Prairie Bible Institute at Three Hills, AB; wanted to go to China in 1937 but was unable to do so because of the China-Japan war; was asked to serve the Edmonton congregation in the then vacant Moravian Church, but declined at first because his German was insufficiently fluent; however, his brother pastor in Calgary, F. W. Kroening, helped him brush up his German; in July 1937 he began as a student pastor in Edmonton; he and Samuel Wedman, pastor at Bruederfeld, exchanged visits for one year during which he learned a great deal about ministerial service and prepared for services.

Pastor Befus re-applied unsuccessfully for the China Inland Mission because the church needed him at home; went to Bethlehem, PA for further study at the Moravian Seminary for two years; was ordained and went to Nicaragua in 1940; returned to Canada for a few months; married Violet Emma Stelter from the Bruderheim congregation; their first furlough was in 1948; returned to Nicaragua in early 1948; the next visit to Canada came in 1954; spent the next two years with the Bruderheim congregation; still struggled with the German language (every second Sunday the morning service was in German at that time); returned to Nicaragua in 1956; the next visit to Canada came in 1959 when he and his wife stayed in Vancouver for three years; returned to Nicaragua until 1966; because there were no openings in Canadian churches at that time he went to one of the Philadelphia churches.

Drebert, Ernst, was preacher at the Edmonton (Norwood) Moravian Church (1912–1913).

Ewald, F., served the Edmonton/Strathcona Moravian Church, AB (1939–1940, Lutheran supply pastor).

Fliegel, John, served Bruederfeld, AB (1923–1928).

Grabow, R.J., served the Calgary Moravian Church (October 1914–November 1917).

Gutensohn, Charles A., served as the Bruderheim, AB, pastor (July 1912–April 1926); Edmonton/Strathcona Moravian, AB (1925–1932); Esk, SK (1927–1939, occasionally); Calgary Moravian, AB (1928–1932, occasionally); [July 1932–July 1939]; Vancouver, B.C. (1944–1945).

Harke, Herbert A., served the Calgary Moravian Church, AB (1953–1958); Jasper Place, Edmonton, AB (1958–1959); Hobbema, AB (1958, supply pastor); Bruderheim, AB (December 1958–May 1961); Heimtal, AB (1992–1995).

Henkelman(n), Gottfried, born in Doabrowo, Warsaw, Poland on December 10, 1855; parents: Gottlieb and Wilhelmine Henkelmann; married Wilhelmine Moller on September 30, 1878; they had seven children; moved to Canada in 1897 to the Colchester area near Edmonton; joined the Bruederfeld Moravian Church; received the license to preach on February 6, 1898; in 1905 while serving as a full-time pastor at Heimtal (1905–1908), he became the founding pastor of the Strathcona Moravian Church (1905–1906) which was consecrated on June 12, 1905; he was followed by Arthur Schultz upon his graduation from the Moravian Seminary in 1906; took over the German school which was associated with the church; while serving at

Heimtal (1905–1908) he served faithfully at Edmonton, Bruderheim and New Sarepta; the Norwood Moravian Church in Edmonton opened on December 1, 1907 with Rev. Henkelman as its first pastor; in 1908 he moved to Calgary and served the Calgary Central Moravian Church until 1911; died in 1925 and was buried at the Bruederfeld Cemetery. Pastor Henkelman was said to be a good musician and helped the settlers with spiritual matters and legal needs.

Heuer, Gustav (United Church), served the Edmonton/Strathcona Moravian Church, AB (1930–1936); Bruce, AB (1932–1935, United Church minister); Bruederfeld, AB (1950–1953).

Hoppel, J.B., served the Calgary Moravian Church (March–May 1915).

Hoyler, Clement, served Bruderheim, AB (February 1896–September 1898); Bruederfeld, AB (1896–1909); Heimtal, AB (1896–1905); Calgary Moravian, AB (1902, founder); New Sarepta, AB (1904–1909); Pleasant Point, SK (August 1, 1909–1914); Dundurn, SK (September 26, 1909–1914); Norwood, Edmonton, AB (1914–1921); Edmonton/Strathcona Moravian, AB (1914–1925).

Clement Hoyler was born in Laketown, MN on May 12, 1872 of German parents who had emigrated to the United States from Wuerttemberg in their youth. He received his education in Wisconsin and later at the Moravian College at Bethlehem, PA at the age of 14, from which he graduated in 1892. He was ordained to the ministry when he was only 20 years old. After having occupied the pastorate of the Moravian Church at Elizabeth, NJ, Hoyler was called to take charge of a mission near Edmonton in January 1896, in Bruderheim; he was assigned by the Home Mission leadership of the Moravian Church in Bethlehem as the first ordained Moravian pastor in Western Canada. The 24-year-old reached Edmonton in early 1896 and founded the Bruderheim and Bruederfeld congregations. In August 1896 he was joined by a co-pastor, the Rev. William Schwarze.

Pastor Hoyler frequently helped Moravian colonists in selecting their homesteads, establishing new settlements and post offices, organizing school districts and congregations, and building churches and parsonages. Over the years, Hoyler was instrumental in the organization of several Moravian congregations. Originally known as the Bruederfeld Moravian Church, the organization of the Millwoods Moravian Church congregation took place on June 27, 1895 under the leadership of Andreas Lilge. Lilge had served the congregation on a part-time basis until February 1896 when the Reverend C. Hoyler arrived. The official establishment of the Heimtal Moravian Church was celebrated on July 26, 1896.

The Calgary Moravian Church was founded on May 18, 1902 under the leadership of Reverend Clement Hoyler. This was the first Moravian Church in Alberta to be established in an urban area. By 1904 a Moravian Church was erected in New Sarepta, named after the town founded by the Moravians in Russia on the Volga River; he pastored at this church from October 1904 to March 1909. In 1904 he was elected president of the Canadian District Executive Board of the Moravian Church in the U.S. and Canada. In 1909 he left Bruederfeld and served in Dundurn and Pleasant Point in Saskatchewan. In 1908 he was consecrated a bishop in Lititz, Pennsylvania and assumed charge of the bishopric of the Moravian church in Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1914. In the same year was called to Edmonton to a building at 99 Street and 84 Avenue, which became the headquarters of the Canadian District. In 1925 the Hoylers returned to the U.S. Rev. Hoyler died in 1959.

Kant, Herbert, a graduate of the Moravian Theological Seminary; took up the pastorship in New Sarepta after the departure of Reinhold Riemer in September 1915; like his predecessor he was an active leader of the young people of the congregation; besides conducting Sunday morning services he met for Sunday afternoon worship services in various homes; English services were conducted, and German services were held on a monthly basis. The Rev. Kant took his leave in June 1920.

Kreitlow, Robert, was a pastor in Bruederfeld, AB (1928–1936, 1960).