

History of Fredsville

Fredsville Lutheran Church, located on the highest geographical point in Grundy County - between Cedar Falls and Dike - will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2021. A year of celebrating and marking the 150th anniversary in 2021 has been trimmed down due to the uncertainty the pandemic has brought. However, history and stories will be shared and there will be opportunities to celebrate - perhaps well in to 2022.

Sources for the subsequent article include anniversary booklets and the book "Growing Up Danish" by Elna M. Petersen.

The first Danish settlers in this area came from Wisconsin in 1866. They were familiar with the Norwegian Synod there and because of this relationship, they contacted the Rev. C. L. Clausen, a Danish pastor serving in the Norwegian Conference. Pastor Clausen came from St. Ansgar, Iowa to preach in this area on several occasions and from the references in the early by-laws, he probably assisted in the organization of the congregation.

In 1871, as spring approached the tiny Danish settlement in the southeast corner of Fairfield Township in Grundy County, Iowa, a small group of settlers came together to organize what was to become the Fredsville Lutheran Church. The initial name was "Fairfield Scandinavian Lutheran Congregation." Early accounts tell of how people would gather in the homes on Sunday to sing hymns, read the scriptures, confess their faith, pray together and sometimes hear a sermon read. From these meager beginnings they moved forward in faith to meet the challenges that faced them in good times and bad.

Prior to 1888, the congregation was variously called "Fairfield Congregation," "the Congregation outside Cedar Falls," and "the Congregation on the Prairie." At the first congregation meeting on January 26, 1888 the suggested name "Fredsville" (Danish for "peaceful village") was approved.

Initially all services were in the Danish language and records indicate that as late as 1952 nine services were held in Danish.

In the earliest days, the village of Fredsville included a general store, a post office, the creamery, butter makers shop, a blacksmith shop, a harness makers shop, a wagon shop, icehouse and well and a cooperage shop where wooden tubs for butter were made. Also, of course, the school and church. At its zenith, the total population of the village may have been as great as twenty souls and was listed on the early maps of Iowa. Most of the population worked at the creamery, the general store and post office or the farm.

Throughout the years the church property included the parsonage, the cemetery (and horse shed), a sexton house and an auditorium. Organizations and programs have included the Ladies Aid Society, the Junior Ladies Aid Society, Lutheran Church Women, Ladies Circles, Lutheran Guild, Lutheran Church Women, Sunday School, choirs, Vacation Bible School, Danish folk dancers, The Young People's Society, and Luther League to name a few.

In 1958 the Fredsville congregation participated with other Lutheran churches in the area and established and built the "Cedar Falls Lutheran Home for the Aged" - now known as "New Aldaya Lifescapes". Fredsville also has ties with Grand View College in Des Moines.

In 1960-61 the new (present) building was built on the north side of the road. The educational wing was added in 1967-68. Previous churches had been located on the south side of the road.

Pastors have been called from all over the United States and from Denmark. In recent years Fredsville has hosted interns as they complete their pastoral journey.

Many traditions have come and gone. Today people may connect Fredsville with the Aebleskiver supper, open-faced sandwiches, Danish strip pastries, the clothing closet, and Vacation Bible School. Throughout the 150 years, however, faith and Christian service remain in a constantly changing world.