

It Happened At St. Paul's

[What follows was written by one of our members whom I buried last year - Albert Brandt. It's the story of his remembrances of the school and parish life from the early 20th century. The german song he remembers from his confirmation my wife sang at his funeral. Spellings are all Albert's, by the way.]

I started going to German American parochial school at St. Paul's New Gehlenbeck in 1921. The teacher then was John Schildt (1919-1934). He had twins and two daughters. The pastor then was Rev. H. H. Hansen, 1909-1934.

School opened daily with a greeting "Good morning dear teacher" in German "Guten morgan, Herr Laerer." We done a lot of singing, much of it out of a book called "Lieder Perlen." Luther's Small Catechism and the Bible were basically taught in the German language. If I remember right Catechism was taught in English one day a week only on Wednesday. All Bible study was in the German languish only and none in English. Reading and writing was taught in both languishes.

Sometimes an upper grade student, always a girl, would help the teacher by reading some class material out loud to the whole school like the "Luther Book" - a German book. She also read English material. It was always girls that done this, never boys. I guess the boys were too dumb.

We had no snow days then. School was never called off because of snow no matter how deep it got. We then would play Fox and Goose in the snow. Everybody walked to school. Northern students would catch a ride on a milk truck and ride part of the way to the school when milk trucks made their debut or first appearance. A ride with travelling vehicles on Hillsboro road was always accepted on our way treking homeward.

The only people we were afraid of was the gypsies travelling in enclosed wagon caravans with heating stoves and stove pipe sticking up thru the roof, pulled by horses. They would camp along the road, usually under a grove of trees. They

were never lost and knew all the back country roads before road maps were available. When they ate their meals they used napkins. They then were and probably still are a nomadic race of people. Their trades were fortune telling, tinkers, peddlers, horse traders, etc. They are still around today but you don't notice them because they now travel in automobiles and mobile trailers and campers.

Many male students at St. Paul's wore bib overalls. Some were home made by their mothers as were the girls dresses. You brought your own lunch to school. Many students carried it in a 1/2 gal. metal molasses tin bucket with a tin lid. I had a metal folding drinking cup. Paper, plastic, and styrofoam cups had not yet been invented.

My father was a trustee at St. Paul's in the 20's. At that time the state passed a law requiring that all doors had to open to the outside. Obeying this requirement, the trustees reversed a door opening on the old brick church on the east end where Rev. Hansen had a small study room. Below the door were 3 or 4 stone steps to ground level. Rev. Hanson was used to the door opening to the inside and as he grabbed hold of the door knob the whole door pushed out to the outside. Rev. Hanson went out with the door and landed 3 or 4 steps down on top of the door. He said in German I could have fallen to my death. "Ich kam zu meinem Tode fallen." The door was changed back to open inwards.

The one room school had a big pot bellied stove for heat in the winter. One time at noon recess one of the boys put a shot gun shell in the hot stove. As the shell exploded the top stove lid blew up to the school ceiling. Another time us boys made wooden arrows out of wood shingles and shot them at the ball at the top of the church steeple. It was lots of fun while it lasted but was soon forbidden "for boten". What goes up must come down. It was a hazard.

When the weather was fair the boys played ball before school opening and during recess with a string ball. Then no student had a real baseball. We all played a ball game called scrub, every body advanced one playing position everytime someone made an out. We never played soft ball. I don't know, maybe that game wasn't

invented yet. We had no soft ball beside a sponge ball which is much smaller than today's soft ball. I played some cork ball with St. Louis relatives but never at school. At that time I regarded it as a game for sissies.

In the twenties during my school days at St. Paul's when attending church services the ladies all wore wide brimmed hats. At that time all church goers arrived with teams of horses on Sunday. There were hitching racks on the north side of church to tie up your horses during church services. We were there in a buggy with a buggy horse named Bill. After services were over I distinctly remember a lady with a big hat walking past the hitching rack where Bill was tied to with a halter and rope. As she passed by so close our horse Bill grabbed the ladies hat off her head with his teeth and started eating her hat. Is that why the ladies don't wear hats anymore?

I remember when all church goers arrived in buggies and surreys to attend church services and there was not one automobile nor any one on the grounds. All transportation of people was by horse power or walking.

On another occasion there was an evening service. An elderly gentleman came driving up to the church grounds with his family to attend services. He was driving a model T Ford with a buggy like top and klaxon hand pushing horn. On top of the roof several chickens and a rooster were roosting on the top and got a free ride to church. They stayed on top of the roof all through the service and got a free ride home. A little breeze.

When you would ask some of the old timers if they spoke English they would answer Yes, I speak American. They didn't call it English but always called it American. My own father called English "American" vs. German.

Once while walking home alone from school a car full of well dressed women stopped to give me a ride. Somehow I felt kind of suspicious about riding with them and declined their offer. When they insisted I ride with them and followed me, I decided it was time to get away from there. I ran and headed across the fields for my home. Maybe they had good intentions or perhaps it was my own

imagination. Being all alone it was a traumatic experience. Some times to this day I think about it. I have been afraid of strange acting women ever since.

One school day in winter the students got permission to go on a rabbit hunt during recess. The congregation owned five acres of ground on the north side across the road. This 5 acres was used for pasture during the summer for Rev. Hansen's cow. The teacher had a pasture on the south side still owned by the congregation, now rented out. The students caught several rabbits by hand no gun allowed and gave them to the teacher and minister. They were happy to get some fresh rabbit meat as they both had families to support and their salaries weren't that great. In winter time when church members butchered hogs, they would fill the teacher and minister's larder with bacon, hams, and sausages.

At another time the Rev. Hansen's cow died. We students watched church members bury this cow on the N.E. part of the church ground. As the cow was lowered into the grave and hit the bottom a big chunk of mud splashed upward right in my face. Students razzed me about this for a long time. It had me worried for a while as a church member had a cow that died from hydrofobia. I can show you the spot where the cow is buried even today. To me it was a most embarrassing situation.

After the cow died and the horse was gone the Rev. Hansen was introduced to a new form of transportation. He became the reluctant owner of a new model T ford automobile. The old cowbarn was to be used as a garage and it had doors on both ends, front and back. The reverend took the car out for a trial run or spin. As he was returning from this first driving experience his daughter Elsie seeing him coming opened both ends of the garage and Reverend made his first try at parking or stopping his car. Driving into the garage, sure enough he went straight through the garage without stopping. He would of never passed today's stringent driving test.

At another time Rev. Hansen model T ford was stolen right out of his garage. It was found in St. Louis filled with pears but still in one piece.

Later on as more English was being spoken in St. Paul's parish a switch was made from having all services in German to having some services in the English language. I don't think that Rev. Hansen had any English language instructions at the cemenary. When preaching on the pulpit he gave it his best under the circumstances. It sounded like a Dr. Henry Kissinger brogue or accent crossed with pidgen English. Anyway leave it to "papa Hansen" he got the message across. He also sported a white "snow bart" or beard. He was held in high esteem and highly respected by parishneers of St. Paul. At the onset of the Great Depression of 1929 and 1930 he asked the congregation to lower his salary.

During school sessions for discipline control the teacher used a long leather whipping strap to chastise unruly students which he ocassionally used. I saw teacher use it on boys but never girls. They apparently were better behaved than the boys. During noon recess while teacher was home for his noon meal some boys would open the drawer on teacher's desk where he kept his wipping strap and cut off a couple of inches of strap. This happened more than once. Apparently teacher never caught onto the prank and by the time I was confirmed and left St. Paul's school there wasn't much strap left.

On another occasion a student was climbing up a young tree and Rev. Hansen came racing out of his house with a big switch and started switching this tree climber asking no questions, just kept on switching. That ended all tree climbing and also potential tree climbers for good.

Teachers then were very strick and believed in the old saying "spare the rod and spoil the child." This was acceptable those days. We did receive a good Christian education and I am thankful for that.

I was confirmed in 1928 and still remember the song the confirmands sang in German, "Vo findet de salla de Heimacht de Ru." For the confirmants, immediately after confirmation the school year was over for that year. At the end of the school day at St. Paul's we would sing "God be with you till we meet again."

And I would like to leave you with one last thought. I hope you never forget it.

Did you ever ask yourself the question: Who am I? What am I doing here? What is the purpose of my life or existence?

You are you and I am I. God's purpose for putting you and I in this world is to win souls for Christ. May God be with you till we all meet again.