

Elling Eielsen

The church building is a testimonial to Elling Eielsen (Hauge Synod), the Norwegian who first began Lutheran worship services in North America (in the Fox River area of Norway, Illinois) in 1839. As a young man he went to Bergen to learn the trades of blacksmithing and carpentering, which was later helpful for the immigrants in America. In 1841, the first church built by Eielsen, was a log cabin structure which burned after several years use. The building there today [the Norsk Museum] took its place. On Oct 18, 1843, Eielsen was ordained in the ministry at Muskego. On April 13-14, 1846, 16 of his congregations between Illinois and Wisconsin gathered at Jefferson Prairie to officially form the Eielsen Synod.

Later, Eielsen was resident pastor at the Jefferson Prairie Settlement from 1855 to 1872. He remained with the synod over the next 30 years and also continued as pastor-at-large for Norwegian-American communities in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Dakota Territory and Texas. Elling Eielsen died in Chicago, Illinois on January 10, 1883 and he was buried in Graceland Cemetery.

Eielsen, as a Norwegian, has the honor of having published the first book* in America in English and the first book in Norwegian. As the story goes, Eielsen found the need for copies of Luther's Catechism, for his new congregation, so he walked to New York, had it published, then walked back to Norway, Ill. The next year he did the same, to publish another book.

Elling Eielsen was the classic Circuit Preacher. He would travel by foot between Wisconsin, Illinois and further out west, to minister to settlers and organize new congregations.

Later, his only son Elias would be killed while working as a carpenter on the famous Palmer House in Chicago.

* About 1843, the first book in English was a translation of Luther's Catechism, and the first book in Norwegian was a facsimile edition of Pontoppidan's "Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed".

There are numerous books and publications about Eielsen.