

St John's Lutheran Church, Ottertail, MN 120 Years of History, 1885-2005  
Taken from the church history book:

By 1880, the population had increased in Otter Tail County to 18,675. German immigrants from the area of Hanover, Germany, arrived in 1882 and 1883 in the territory now served by St John's.

The Wilhelm Schultz family was one of the first families to arrive in 1882. Herman Heinrich Luders and Hermann Thalmann came in 1883 to settle in Leaf Lake Township. In 1883 and 1885, the number of German Lutheran immigrants to the area increased rapidly.

Immigrants Herman and Maria Luders sought out a Lutheran pastor after the death of their child in 1883. Pastor H Glaess, serving the preaching stations of Perham, MN, area, was called to conduct the funeral. As far as can be ascertained, Pastor Glaess held no regular services in the community of Leaf Lake/Ottertail. Pastor Glaess left the Perham area in 1883, extending his missionary journeys into Montana and Canada.

Services at Leaf Lake/Ottertail continued to be held in the homes of Luders and Wiebe. As the need for larger quarters than the homes of settlers became necessary, services were held in the rural District #185 school, which had been organized in 1884 near the east shore of Portage Lake (this would be at the west end of the now Luders' driveway).

In 1885, under the direction of Pastor Friedrich Kretzschmar, the Evangelical St Johannes Lutheran Church of Leaf Lake Township was organized. The first nine voting members were Hermann Bierwagen, Hermann Cordes, Christ Gremmert, Friedrich Lueders, Hermann H Lueders, Gottfried Mielke, Wilhelm Schulz, Hermann Thalmann, and Heinrich Wiebe. Land was purchased from Heinrich Wiebe in Leaf Lake Township to be used as a cemetery, which is present owned by St John's Lutheran Church.

Also in 1885, the first communion service was conducted in the community by Pastor Kretzschmar, at which 20 communicants were present and received Holy Communion, including:

Herman H Lueders, Mary Lueders, Fred(Fritz) Lueders, gottfried Mielke, Albertine Mielke, Dorothy Thalmann, herman Thalmann, Dietrich Thalmann, Henry Truhn, Mary Truhn, Albert marquardt, Augusta marquardt, Wm Leseberg, Emme Leseerg, Christ Gremmert, Dorothy Gremmerty, Wm gremmert, Wm Schultz and Ida Schultz.

1894:

John Wiebe built the baptismal font in 1894. The date can be found written on the underside.

1884-85 Voting members:

Some include Hermann Cordes, Heinrich Grefe, Friedrich Lueders, HH Luders, Friedrich (Fritz) Ohlrogge, Dietrich Stege, Heinrich and Wilhelm Schulz, Dietrich Thalmann, Friedrich Thalmann, Hermann Thalmann, Heinrich Thalmann, Dietrich True, Heinrich Wiebe, John Wiebe, and John H Wiebe.

In 1885, The first marriage solemnized was that of Fred H Truhn on July 2, 1885. The First marriage was that of Fred Lueders (half brother of H H Luders, and brother of Maria Luders Wiebe) and Doris Dunker at the home of Henry and Maria Luders Wiebe on Feb 12, 1886.

1895: The first parsonage: Two acres of land was purchased from Heinrich Wiebe to build a parsonage. It was 20 x 28 and was completed in 18896. A horse barn and fences were also built that year.

By 1897, each member was to provide the pastor with two bushels of oats, 1/2 cord of wood for the parsonage, and 1/2 cord of wood for the church. In 1897, Fritz Ohlrogge received \$12 annually to heat and clean the church. In 1918, Herman Menze was paid \$75 per year to clean and heat the church and ring the church bell on Saturday evenings.

The first marriage in church records was between Fritz (Friedrich) Lueders and Doris Dunker on Feb 12, 1886 at the home of Heinrich Wiebe. Although history tells of a child of H H Luders dying, the first recorded burial in the church records is of Dora Thalmann, a child of Hermann and Doris Thalmann, who died in 1887.