

Geysir Lutheran Church

Many of the early pioneers that settled in the Geysir district had a strong religious background and were staunch supporters of the Lutheran Church. They had brought with them their most valuable religious books from Iceland, the Bible, the New Testament, hymns books, the "Passion hymns" of Reverend Hallgrímur Pétursson, the Postil of Bishop Jón Víðalín and the "Hugvekjur" (brief sermons for home devotions) of Rev. Pétur Pétursson and the Lutheran Catechism.

Before the congregation was established, it was a custom for some families to get together on a Sunday for a short devotional period. Hymns were sung and a sermon read from their favorite postil or "Hugvekjur".

The infant death rate was very high at the time and often a minister could not be contacted and the funeral rites were conducted by laymen.

In 1887, Rev. Magnús Skaptason arrived from Iceland and was sent by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (E.L.S.) to serve the New Iceland congregations and visit nearby communities to perform ordinary ministerial services when requested. He visited Geysir and had services there in private homes, including baptisms and confirmations.

In the third year of his ministry, Rev. Skaptason began to lean more and more towards Unitarianism. This led to dissension and created a rift within the community.

In the spring of 1890, Jón Pétursson, a devout Lutheran, called a meeting at his home, Fljótshlíð. Interested Lutherans attended the meeting and a decision was made to establish a Lutheran congregation in Geysir. It was called the "Fljótshlíðar Congregation". Later that summer, a Synodical Convention was held in Riverton and the newly formed congregation joined the E.L.S. Jón Pétursson was the delegate and he reported that there were 66 confirmed and 72 unconfirmed members in the Fljótshlíðar congregation.

The first years were difficult ones for the new congregation. After joining the Synod, the members had expected to receive at least two or three services a year. This, however, was not possible as there were only four Lutheran ministers in the Synod and many congregations had to be served. Rev. Skaptason was also serving as a Unitarian minister in the district and had many followers.

From 1892-96, the Fljótshlíðar congregation did not send a delegate to the Synodical convention and, in its reports, it was termed "inactive",

During these years, Rev. Hafsteinn Pétursson,

Rev. Jonas Sigurðson and Rev. Oddur Gíslason had visited the congregation, had the odd service, and baptized and confirmed members (who had been instructed by local laymen).

In the fall of 1896, it was reported that a confirmation would be performed in a private home in the western part of the district. Three children had been prepared for confirmation in the eastern zone and decided to walk the 4-5 miles to be confirmed. When they came to the home, they discovered that the confirmation would be performed in the Unitarian faith. The father of the three Lutheran children refused to have them confirmed except as Lutherans. The minister complied with the father's request.

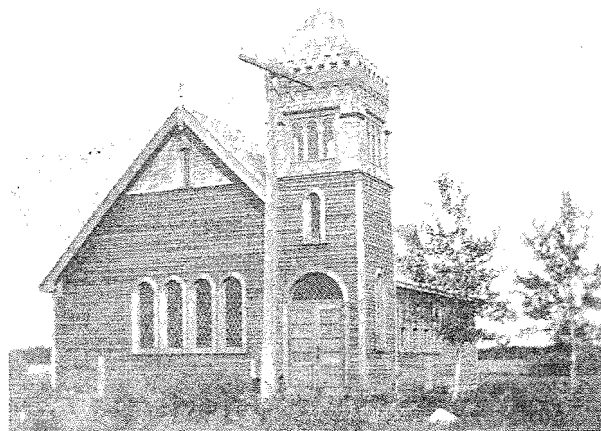
This incident was the spur needed to make the Lutherans realize that their congregation should be reorganized. In 1897, Rev. Jonas Sigurðson and Rev. Oddur Gíslason held a service in Geysir, followed by a congregational meeting. It was decided to keep the Fljótshlíðar congregation going.

The following year theology student Runólfur Marteinnsson was sent by the Synod to do missionary work in the northern congregation during the summer months.

In 1900, the Fljótshlíðar congregation was renamed the Geysir congregation and in 1901 Rev. Runólfur Marteinnsson became the pastor of all the New Iceland congregations. Travelling was still very difficult and Geysir received only a few services a year.

In 1908, Rev. Jóhann Bjarnason became the pastor of all the Lutheran congregations north of Arnes and served them for twenty years.

At first, all church services were held in the Geysir school but, in 1914, the congregation was



Geysir church in 1928.