



John (Johann) Jacob Riess
Pastor 1839 (four months)

Belleville, originally known as Compton Hill, was twenty-five years old in 1839.

Riess was ordained in 1835 at Loerrach, Germany. Sent by the Basel (Switzerland) Mission Society in answer from Germans in America for ordained ministers. On October 11, 1835, he landed at New York City, the first ordained pastor of the Evangelical Synod to set foot on American soil. In November, he arrived in St. Clair County and took up residence in Millstadt where he established Zion Church.

On March 17, 1839, Riess preached and held communion for a public crowd at the County Court House in Belleville. Later that day, a group of Protestant German families, who attended the service, called him to be their pastor.

He held the first congregational meeting of his church that day. He asked that a name should be chosen for the new church. Mr. Adolph Hildebrant, newly elected president of the congregation, spoke in reply, "... remembering that our troubled exodus really had its beginning in that political meeting at St. Paul's Church of Frankfurt on the Main; remembering all that, I say there can be only one name given to our new church... St. Paul's Church..."

The church he began was the first German Protestant church in southern Illinois. It was known simply as the "Freie Protestantische Gemeinde in Belleville" or the Free Protestant Church.

In addition to being our pastor, Riess preached on Turkey Hill outside of Belleville. He rode horseback between his services in the morning and afternoon. The tremendous summer heat of 1839 brought Riess to a complete physical breakdown. For seven weeks, he lay between life and death with fever and delirium.

On October 9, 1839, Riess closed his connections with Belleville with the following short paragraph in his diary, "Preacher William Flickinger took over my congregations in Belleville and Turkey Hill."

Riess continued to service as pastor at various locations until his death on July 8th, 1855.

Information Sources:

1909 70th Jubilee Booklet of St. Paul's by Reverend Otto F. Pessel. Translation from the German by Lynn C. Koehler of our congregation, 1973

The Church History portion of the Saint Paul United Church of Christ Pastoral Position document, 1984

Milestones of Our Heritage, St. Paul's publication celebrating the 150th Anniversary year, 1989. Proof copy.

Diary of Reverend Riess, supplied by his grandson, the Honorable Aldred Riess, Dircuit Judge of southern Illinois and resident of Red Bud, Illinois. Published in Our St. Paul's, October, 1942

Obituary or Pastor Johann Jakob Riess, 1855. Published in Der Friedensbote of August 1, 1855. Translated on March 28, 1997 by Eric Oppenheimer, St. Louis, MO with footnotes by Robert Beucher of St. Louis, MO.