

1991  
SESQUICENTENNIAL YEAR  
TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

## PROFESSOR CRAEMER

--- A Man of the Bible ---

Trinity members called him "Onkle" Craemer; and the congregation held him in high regard despite some differences of opinions that he had with our Voter's Assembly. Craemer Hall still stands on the old campus of Springfield's Concordia Seminary; yet, few present day Trinity members, benefitters of his remarkable legacy, are familiar with this multi-talented man of God.

It would be difficult to find another person in Trinity's history to match Professor Craemer's diverse efforts in life, and it is this diversity that makes him such an interesting individual to study. Here was a man who was a university scholar in linguistics who also spent six years in jail. A teacher at England's Oxford, he also taught in the humble dwellings of Chippewa Indians. A proud man, able to converse in six languages, he learned to speak the tongue of the American aborigines. Although he demanded the highest moral standards among his congregation members, his own marriage caused a scandal. Quarrelsome and with a fiery temperament, he also proved to be a warm and caring person.



Professor Friedrich August Craemer

*"Tell of all his wonderful acts!"*

PSALMS 105:2



**Craemer Hall on Concordia Campus now owned by the Department of Corrections of the State of Illinois.**

Friedrich August Craemer was born of Lutheran parents on May 28, 1812, in the Bavarian town of Klein-Langheim. His father was a merchant, and it appears that Friedrich received an extensive education as a young man. While studying theology at the University of Erlangen, he became leader of a Patriotic Student's Society and was involved in a minor rebellion. For his participation he was arrested and jailed for three years waiting trial, sentenced to three more years, and acquitted in 1839. He also had drifted from the faith.

He enrolled in the University of Munich, but here he experienced a conversion - "the lightning of Sinai suddenly struck deeply into my soul. My sins stood before me like mountains, and floods of God's wrath engulfed me." But the grace of God also stood before him; and through the study of the Formula of Concord and the doctrine of the election of grace, he "returned to the faith of his fathers." He held various tutoring positions before going to Oxford to teach German language and litera-

ture, but his fiery nature and confessional beliefs resulted in many confrontations with Anglican church officers.

It was during his stay at Oxford that he came upon a copy of Pastor Wyneken's appeal for Lutheran pastors, and he resolved to return to Germany and prepare to bring the Bible to the New World. In the home of Pastor Wilhelm Loehe, Craemer and a tiny group of Lutherans prepared to emigrate to America to begin a mission among the Indians. One of the members of the group was a former copper engraver who was a ministerial candidate - Friedrich Lochner. Both were ordained before setting sail, and during the voyage they conducted services and taught school.

During the trip Pastor Craemer fell in love with twenty seven year old Dorthea Benthein. She was coming to America to seek a new life because her five year old son, Henry, had been born out of wedlock. The members of Craemer's flock were shocked - it was scandalous that a Lutheran pastor should even consider marrying such a woman, and the relationship produced much alienation.

But Craemer persisted, and when the *Caroline* docked in New York, they were married in St. Matthew's Church (the oldest Lutheran Church in America which later joined the Missouri Synod). The marriage strained the already difficult relations between Craemer and the colonists. Time, however, proved Dorthea to be among the truest and ablest of loving Christian helpmates as she labored among the Indians and

later with the seminary students. One historian states that she "must be recognized among the heroines" of Lutheran history.

They made their way to the Saginaw Valley area of Michigan. In 1845, before lumbering interests and industry reshaped the area, it was true wilderness. With hard work, the little band cleared the ground and founded Frankenmuth. It was a goal of the group to establish a missionary effort among the Chippewa Indians. For five years Craemer worked hard at the mission effort, and Dorthea scrubbed and deloused many Indian children and tried to teach them proper manners. However, for various reasons, the mission effort among the Indians was not considered a success. During the same five years, Craemer's relations with his parishioners improved immensely; the membership had jumped from the original fifteen to more than 230 in the sparsely settled area, and the congregation had become a charter member of the Missouri Synod.

**I**n 1850 Craemer accepted a call to the professorship at the Fort Wayne Seminary. In November he preached his farewell sermon to the Frankenmuth St. Lorenz congregation which, despite past difficulties, was truly saddened to see him leave. The entire congregation escorted him and his family for part of the journey to Fort Wayne, and many tears were shed. He was thirty-eight at the time and would spend the remaining forty-one years of his temporal existence with Concordia's "practical" seminary.

In 1861, because of the Civil War and other reasons, the seminary was transferred from Fort Wayne to St. Louis to join the "theoretical" seminary. During the fourteen years in St. Louis, Professor Craemer and F.F.W. Walther worked side-by-side. For ten of those years, Craemer served a congregation of tough, explosive people in nearby Minerstown without pay. The fiery pastor fought to keep members there who wanted to take part in funerals with their "hocus focus." On one occasion, he locked himself in the church with the corpse to keep them out.

In 1875 the Missouri Synod resolved to move the "practical" seminary, with sixty-three year old Craemer as president, to Springfield. Shortly after arriving in Springfield, Craemer was requested by Trinity to be an interim pastor; and for the next sixteen years Craemer served Trinity in different pastoral roles. He was also an active participant in the Voter's Assembly. For twelve of those years he was assistant pastor under his old friend, Pastor Freidrich Lochner.

**O**n May 3, 1891, while praying the Lord's Prayer, Professor "Uncle" Craemer breathed his last. Over two thousand mourners marched with the hearse from the seminary to the new Trinity Church for

services. The newspapers said it was the second largest funeral, behind Abraham Lincoln's, the city had ever witnessed. He lies next to Dorthea in Oak Ridge Cemetary.



**Professor and Dorthea Craemer's headstone in Oak Ridge.**