



REVEREND FRANCIS SPRINGER

— The Father of Lutheranism in Springfield —

On Sunday, September 19, 1841, eight Springfield citizens met at the home of Rev. Francis Springer at the corner of Eighth and Jackson and incorporated the first Lutheran Church in Springfield.

On the cover page of his record book, Rev. Springer noted the occasion with the following entry:

“Assisted by Rev. Daniel Scherer whom I had invited from Hillsboro, Ills., I organized the first Lutheran Church in Springfield, Ills., Sept ember 19, 1841. There were eight who entered into the organization that day, namely

Jacob Diveibless
George Myers
Frederick Myers
James Zwisler, Jr.
John Myers
Mrs. Elizabeth Myers
Mrs. Mary Springer (my wife)
and Rev. Francis Springer

It was understood and agreed that this organization was made on the basis of the Augsburg Confession, as recognized in the Formula of Government published in the General. Synod’s hymn book & that said Formula, so far as applicable to our local surrounding, should be our guide in the management of ecclesiastical affairs.

Others joined our little band soon after.”

The record book goes on to list each of Rev. Springer’s sermons, and all of the baptisms, marriages, and burial services he performed, beginning with his arrival in Springfield in May 1839. Francis Springer was born in Roxbury, Franklin County, Pennsylvania, in 1810. Orphaned at age five, he was raised by a Lutheran minister until age 14 when he was indentured to a carriage and ornamental painter for four years. Although his opportunities for education were limited in his childhood, he entered Pennsylvania College, Gettysburg, immediately following his indenture.

He supported himself with occasional teaching jobs, as well as worked as a painter, and continued his studies at



“Tell of all his wonderful acts!”

the Lutheran Theological Seminary, also in Gettysburg, and traveled to Otego and Schohaire, New York, to learn from well-known ministers at those sites.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Maryland licensed him to preach on October 18, 1836. Six months later, on April 11, 1837, he married Mary Kreigh at Clear Spring, Maryland, and was ordained by the Maryland Synod on October 17, 1837.

The Springers traveled west to work with Rev. Daniel Scherer, who is credited with bringing the Lutheran religion to Illinois. Based in Hillsboro, Rev. Scherer traveled the state as a circuit pastor, establishing new churches when ever possible. After working in Hillsboro for a few months, the Springers moved north to Springfield.

A few weeks after his arrival, Rev. Springer placed the following advertisement in the Sangamo Journal:

English and Classical School

By Rev Francis Springer

This school is designed to furnish the means of a thorough English and Classical education. Those who patronize it may zest assured that every suitable exertion will be made to render it an efficient auxiliary in the cause of mental and moral improvement.

The school room is that which was lately occupied by Mrs. Lee. The school will commence on Mon day, 24th June.

Tenns.—Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, per quarter \$4.00.

English, Grammar, Geography, Desodplive Astronomy (with use of globes), History, Rhetoric, and Composition, \$6.00.

Latin and Greek Languages, Mathematics, Chemistry and Natural Philosophy, Mental and Moral Science, and Evidences of Christ ianity, \$7.00.

Springfield, June 20, 1839

In addition to his teaching duties, Rev. Springer preached in his home, at the school, in public halls, and in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. He also ministered to the needs of Lutherans in outlying towns such as Buffalo Heart, Buckhart Rochester, and Spring Creek, as well as Springfield. He carefully recorded all of his activities in his record book.

After six months in the state capital, the Springers purchased a lot at the corner of Eighth and Jackson Streets, in a new subdivision being developed by Elijah Iles. A few months later, in early 1840, an Episcopalian minister, Rev. Charles Dresser, and his family moved into a new home across Jackson street.

In 1840, State Representative

Abraham Lincoln wrote and sponsored legislation to incorporate the “Mechanics Union,” a group of laborers concerned about the educational needs of their children. The charter gave the following purposes for the Union: “Relief to the sick and disabled members there of, and to the widows and orphans of deceased members; for the establishment of a common school and a public library, and for the promotion of literature, science, and the mechanic arts.”

December 1842, the Mechanics Union purchased the former First Presbyterian Church building at the corner of Third and Washington Streets and began conducting classes soon thereafter. In 1844, Rev. Springer was

hired as a teacher for the School. The subscriptions from prominent residents advent of a good public school system, Usually, frontier churches looked to as well as a chronic shortage of funds, well-established cities in the east for brought about the demise of the support. In 1851, when those attempts Mechanics Union School in 1847. Rev, failed, however, Hillsboro College Springer had, by that time, moved on to looked north to Springfield and found the post of 'principle teacher' for the fertile ground One of the early sub Springfield City School scribes was Rev Springer's friend

Abraham Lincoln

Rev. Charles Dresser sold his home to Abraham Lincoln in 1844, and the Lincolns became the Springer's new neighbors. While there is no documentation of their daily encounters, it is safe to assume that their children probably played together and that the wives, both of whom had husbands who traveled on circuits, became well-acquainted.

Lincoln's only known comments about his neighbor were penned in an April 13 1864 letter in which Lincoln described Rev Springer as one of my best friends, than whom there is no more dependable man." At the time, Springer was serving as a chaplain in the Civil War.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West named Rev. Springer their president in 1846, and he began to tiny el to Hillsboro on an even more regular basis In 1847 the Synod began an educational endeavor in Hillsboro called the "Literary and Theological Institute of the Evangelical Institute of the Far West," (commonly called Hillsboro College or Lutheran College) and Rev. Springer became its first president. At the same time, he received a call to be pastor of Hillsboro's Zion Lutheran Church. The Springers sold their home and moved to Hillsboro.

Although the School was well- received and attracted students from most of the surrounding states, it was sometimes necessary to raise funds with

The financial support Springfield residents had provided the college convinced the founders that moving the institution to Springfield might increase its opportunities for growth. To further increase the amount of support provided by Springfield citizens, the name of the School was changed to Illinois State University, and it moved to temporary quarters on Washington and Third Streets in Springfield in early 1852. Originally the Presbyterian Church, the building had also housed the Lutheran congregation. Rev. Springer was, of course well-acquainted with the building from his tenure at the Mechanics Union School.

Eight acres of land approximately 1.5 miles northeast of the statehouse was donated by the Pascal Enos family in July 1852. Springfield Mayor James Conkling gave the address at the corner stone laying ceremony, and the citizens of Springfield provided a great deal of monetary support. Students began attending classes in their new quarters in 1854.

Many prominent citizens, including most of the patriarchs of Springfield, served on the Board of Trustees of Illinois State University. Abraham Lincoln was elected to the Board in June 1860. Robert Todd Lincoln and John Hay attended the school in the late 1850s.

In 1855, Rev. Springer resigned from his post as president of the University, possibly in response to criticisms about the poor financial status of the institution.

Rev. Springer continued his educational career in Springfield, first as principle of the Ward I School, and later as Superintendent of the Springfield public school district. He left that post in 1861 to enlist in the army. When he was refused due to his age, he offered his services as chaplain to the 10th Illinois Cavalry. His regiment eventually ended up in Fort Smith, Arkansas, an old military post, and Rev. Springer was named chaplain of the post. He was also made superintendent of the Freedman's Bureau while at Fort Smith.

His experiences with the people of the south, made homeless and often traumatized by the war, convinced him that at least some of them would have a better life in the north. He communicated his ideas to Elijah Iles and James Lamb, and the three of them purchased property at 1308 South Seventh and built the "Home for the Friendless." Widows and orphans then began to arrive on trains from the south. The Illinois State Journal documented one such arrival in May 1863 with the following description:

"Objects of Charity—The families of Arkansas refugees who have been driven from their homes by the fiendish rebellion arrived in this city last night on the Chicago, Alton & St. Louis R.R. in a most destitute condition. They were met at the depot by some charitable citizens and furnished with temporary shelter and some food given them. We are informed they presented a most



An early photograph of Rev. Francis Springer, probably taken around the time of his arrival in Springfield.

pitiable sight, emaciated and ragged. They are fit objects of charity for such of our citizens as exercise that Christian virtue. Money or articles of food or clothing left at the store of John Williams & Company will reach these poor unfortunates.”

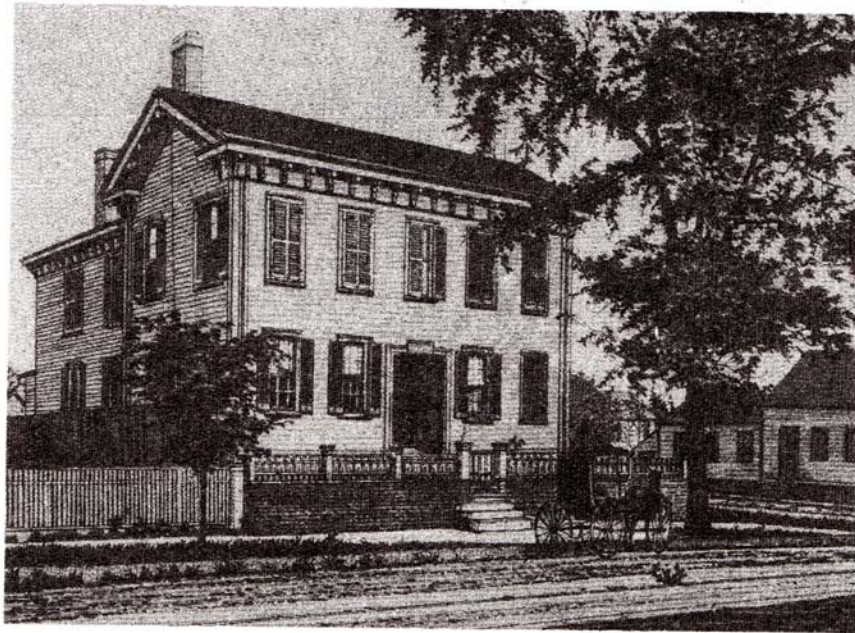
Although several name changes have taken place, the Home for the Friendless survives to this day as the Family Service Center, still in the same location. The original Victorian three-story brick structure with mansard roof was razed to make room for a more modern structure in the 1930s.

While serving as Chaplain of the Post of Fort Smith Arkansas, Rev Springer was also named Chaplain U S A He retained both titles until he resigned in August 1867. Upon his return to Springfield he resumed his preaching and teaching careers

In 1874, Rev. Springer moved to Hillsboro and served as the Montgomery County Superintendent of Schools for the next four years While in Hillsboro, he kept in close contact with his family and friends in Springfield and was a regular speaker at Grace Lutheran Church.

In November 1883, he was mustered into the Stephenson Post No. 30, Springfield, Illinois, of the Grand Army of the Republic and was soon thereafter elected the post's Chaplain, an office he held until his death in October 1892.

While Rev. Springer had little contact with the church that would become Trinity Lutheran Church after the original Lutheran Church split into two separate congregations he remained very



This 1860s era lithograph of Lincoln's home shows the original site of Rev, Francis Springer's home. Our congregation's first divine service was held in this house.

much involved in the Lutheran community in Springfield as evidenced by his work with Illinois State University.

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Although there are no statues of Rev Springer to acknowledge his many contributions to the city of Springfield, the state of Illinois, and the many local organizations he so diligently created and supported, monuments of another sort exist in the fact that both Trinity Lutheran Church and Grace Lutheran Church continue to exist and can be traced back to that first meeting in his home in September 1841; Illinois State University campus was later used by Concordia Theological Seminary, still in existence though in another location; the Home for the Friendless still operates in its same location as the Family Service Center; and his home, used for so many religious and community events, is still across the street from his much-more-recognized friend.



A composite photograph of the Springer family:

(Top row, l-r) Rev. Francis Springer; Mary Elizabeth, Philip Melancthon, Annie Grace, and Mrs. Mary Kreigh Springer

(Second row, l-r) Charles Sullivan Francis Kreigh Ida Francis Mana Laura Louisa, and John George



Rev. Francis Springer in his later years.