

Grace Hill Time Line

(Compiled by Doreen Harms)

Beginning in the 1540's and early 1600's

Frisian & Flemish Mennonites went to the Vistula River area of Poland/West Prussia to develop the swampland into productive farms by building dikes and dams. Michalin forefathers, for the most part, did not come from the Vistula Delta (the triangle between the Vistula and Nogat Rivers), but from the Vistula Lowlands, particularly the area between Culm, Graudenz and Thorn. They came to the Vistula area at various times from several places in Friesland. The Vistula Delta Mennonites were of Flemish background generally; Michalin ancestors were Frisian in origin. Their houses and barns in Poland were usually built under one roof as many are in Friesland, Netherlands, even today.

1700's and 1800's

- 1780 - A wealthy nobleman named Potocki offered favorable terms to settle his land in then eastern Poland in the province of Volhynia (This part of Volhynia became Russian in 1793)
- 1783 - Settlement called "Michalin." Oldest established Mennonite settlement in Russia
- 1811 - Several ministers including Hans Harms & David Siebrandt, arrived from South Russia and organized the church. Grace Hill Church dates its founding in 1811.
- 1874, Dec. 5 - The main group of immigrants left Michalin on Nov. 1, 1874, under the leadership of their elder, Johann Schroeder. They sailed from Antwerp on Nov. 10, 1874 & arrived in Peabody, KS on Dec. 5, 1874. A group of 47 arrived earlier in Newton on November 21, 1874. The last group of 24 persons remained in Russia to collect money for the land. They were unsuccessful. They arrived in New York on June 24, 1878, and came to Newton by train.
- 1875 - The group located on about 3,500 acres near Sheldon in Harvey Co., Kansas.
- 1875 - Church services were held in the school building of District 38, a half mile east of the present church. The church was incorporated this year.
- 1878 - Charter for Gnadenberg Mennonite Church
- 1878, Oct. 6 - The first baptism in the US
- 1879, March 12 - Certificate from Atchison, Topeka & Sante Fe Railroad Co. for 40 acres of land to Gnadenberg Church, Sheldon, Kansas, c/o P. H. Schmidt
- 1879 - The Sunday School at Gnadenberg was organized
- Date Uncertain - Johann & Agneta Klaassen gave an acre of land to the church for building.
- 1880 - Ground breaking for the new church. Stones were quarried ca. 7-10 miles east; David Schroeder was the lead carpenter/mason.
- 1882, April 23 - The first church building (stone) was dedicated
- 1882, May 30 - The first wedding in the US: Marie Klaassen & Jacob A. Unruh (celebration lasted 3 days, beginning with 1-hour sermon; no honeymoon!)
- 1883, Jan. 4 - Johann & Agneta Klaassen gave 1 acre of land to the church
- 1883, May 14 - First baptism in the stone church
- 1886, March 31 - Johann & Agneta Klaassen gave another acre of land to the church
- 1893 - The Women's Mission Society was organized
- 1894 - The Christian Endeavor Society was organized
- 1897, April 17 - Constitution adopted. Church board: 5 members (1 elected from each of 4 districts + the treasurer)
- 1899, October 30 - Heinrich H. and Elizabeth Harms deeded land to the church

1900's

1912 - First

organ (pump) was purchased

1927, July 21 - Original charter of Gnadenberg church, Sheldon, KS, dated 1878 was filed

1928 - The Women's Study Class was organized

1930 - First piano was purchased and first wedding to be conducted in the English language

1936 - Worship changed from German to English. Sunday School changed slower, class by class.

1940's - Young married couples slowly began to sit together; until then men sat on the north side, women south.

1947 - The first yearbook

1949, Dec. 4 - Celebrated the 75th anniversary. Service in the morning with covered dish dinner and afternoon of visiting at the Ben Schmidt farm.

1951, March 25 - The first printed bulletin

1951, December 28 - At the annual business meeting, the congregation voted to build a new church.

1953, March 30 - Isaac & Helen Harms deeded land to the church for the new building

1953, April 5 - Ground breaking service for the new brick church held this Easter Sunday afternoon.

1953, October 5 - The name was officially changed from Gnadenberg to Grace Hill Mennonite Church

1953, October 18 - Cornerstone laying service for the new brick church this Sunday afternoon

1954, January 29 - Amendment to Articles of Incorporation changing name to Grace Hill Mennonite Church, Whitewater, Kansas

1954, August 1 - Farewell service in the old church this Sunday A.M. Dedication service for the new church this Sunday afternoon

1954, Sept. 6-7 - Demolition of the old stone church

1956, Nov. 22 - Note Burning Ceremony for the brick church

1968, April 9 - Oil charter with Slawson Oil, c/o Melvin Klaassen

1970, May 14 - The church voted to build an Education Wing.

1971, January 3 - Ground breaking for the Education Wing

1972, May 14 - Dedication Service for Education Wing

1974 - October. Harvest Thanks and Centennial observance held together.

1976 - Fold dividers were added to Fellowship Hall (basement) for SS classes

Jan. 1978-June 1979 - the church was between pastors. Palmer Becker was the Pastor on Call, at least part of that time until he and Ardys moved to Richmond, B.C., Canada

1979, June 3 - Installation service for Pastor Vernon Lohrentz

1983 - First combined Grace Hill and Zion Bible School

1983, Aug. 28 - Dedication service for Stained Glass Windows and Sanctuary Stage improvements

1989 - Adopted the first mission statement

1996, February - Heating and air conditioning installed in the sanctuary

1996, Spring - first part-time paid church secretary (Debbie Claassen)

1999 - First part-time paid music coordinator (Sheila Epp)

1999, Nov. 26-28 - 125th Anniversary Celebration for 125 years in the U.S.

2000's

- 2000, June 25** - Groundbreaking service for the new sanctuary
- 2001, June 3**, Cornerstone laying for the new sanctuary
- 2001, September 2** - Transition service into the new sanctuary
- 2001, November 25** - Dedication service for the new sanctuary
- 2003** - Administrative restructuring began
- 2004, Sept. 1** - first full-time youth pastor, Brett Klingenberg
- 2007, Aug. 1** - full-time youth pastor, Katherine Krehbiel Goerzen
- 2008, Dec. 31** – Pastor Jim Voth's last day as Pastor at Grace Hill
- 2009, January 4** – Farewell for Pastor Jim Voth and Barb
- 2009, June 14** – Congregation voted to extend call to Peter Goerzen for the lead pastor role
- 2009, August 2** - full-time lead pastor, Peter Goerzen, installed
- 2009, August** - adopted a sister church: La Iglesia Menonita Comunidad de Esperanza, Dallas, Texas
- 2010, Feb. 7** - Katherine Goerzen named Associate Pastor with Youth Emphasis
- 2011, Sept. 3** - Celebrating Grace Hill's bicentennial
- 2013, Feb.-May** - Sabbatical for the Goerzens to attend Seminary in Elkhart, IN. Weldon Martens, Interim Pastor
- 2014, July 27** - Pastors Katherine & Peter Goerzen's last day as pastors at Grace Hill
- 2014, Aug. 31**- Randy Smith, transition pastor

Pastors

- 1875-1900** - Johann Schroeder, Andreas Harms, Heinrich Nickel and Jacob R. Toews (all served as unsalaried ministers)
- 1901-1941** - G. N. Harms, lay pastor until the very last several years when he was paid a stipend.
- 1937-1941** - J. J. Voth was part-time assistant pastor
- 1941-1949** - J. J. Voth was part-time lead pastor
- 1949-1962** - Herbert Miller was part-time pastor
- 1963-1978** - Edmund Miller was part-time until Aug. 1, 1965 when he became the first full-time minister.
- 06/1979-10/1985** - Vernon Lohrentz
- 10/1985-12/31/2008** - James Voth, full-time lead pastor
- 01/2009-09/2009** - Marvin Zehr, interim pastor
- Aug. 2009** - Peter Goerzen, full-time lead pastor
- 2/07/2010** - Katherine Goerzen named Associate Pastor with Youth Emphasis
- 02-05/2013** - Weldon Martens, Interim Pastor, during the Goerzen seminary study sabbatical.
- 7/27/2014** - last service of Pastors Katherine and Peter Goerzen.
- 8/31/2014** – Randy Smith began as transition Pastor

Youth Pastors:

- 2004-2007** - First youth pastor, Brett Klingenberg, full-time
- 8/2007-** - Youth pastor, Katherine Goerzen, full-time (became Associate Pastor w. Youth Emphasis in 2/2010 & part-time after their 2 children were born)