

A New Frontier: Establishing a Church in the City

The brethren warmly greeted one another at the door. They came from all directions – some walked, a few by car, many by streetcar. The front double-doors – extending out from the generous, brick foyer – swung open to each visitor as if they held the promise of a welcoming haven, a place of refuge. Above the door, bold letters, “Apostolic Christian Church” declared the purpose of the building; “2122” identified the location on Sunnyside Avenue in Chicago.

The believers of Chicago Apostolic Christian Church now had a home, a place of worship at 2122 W. Sunnyside Avenue. It was a day of dedication – August 1937 – the first worship services in their new church.

The congregation first became organized in 1925 on the near west side of Chicago where many brethren lived. Initially they met in homes or apartments, then briefly rented a Union Hall and eventually a vacant church building – all in the same neighborhood, three miles west of the Loop.

They were pioneering an urban frontier for the Apostolic Christian Church with origins in Switzerland¹ and a presence in America for many decades.² While the young, developing church had deep roots in the rural-based denomination, several individuals and families were migrating to the city; it was a rarity for a city church to take shape at that time.

With regular services in progress, the small group appointed officers and Sunday school teachers, installed two ministers, and enjoyed the fruit of their labors with a few converts.

After the 1929 stock market crash, an additional influx of Apostolic Christians moved to the city for employment, many found work on the North Side. Eli Winzeler, whose family lived in Lincoln Square, discovered a modestly-sized Lutheran church in his neighborhood – a potential fit for the increasing congregation. Through a simple inquiry, he learned they were willing to sell their building, due to the challenging economic times.

A contract of sale was signed April 14, 1937. They proceeded with an extensive remodeling project: the large steeple was removed, a rear stairway installed, two functional washrooms and a kitchen were added, and minor decorating concerns were addressed. After new pews and a pulpit were installed, the modified structure was ready to be occupied – the dawning of a new era.

Nearly every pew was filled for the first services in the new church, affectionately called “Sunnyside” yet today. As the congregation joined their voices in *a cappella* singing, there was a sense that “the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord” (1 Kings 8:11).

The walls of the sanctuary contained the “living” house of the Lord, people who form the Body of Christ. Many were young women from central Illinois, employed as domestics; some were young families, struggling to make ends meet; most were Swiss-German immigrants, figuring out life in a new world; all were displaced from loved ones, looking for a home away from home. Together, they became family, a body of believers bound together by God’s love.

¹ Herman Ruegger. *Apostolic Christian Church History, Volume I*. (Chicago: Apostolic Christian Publishing, 1949).

² Perry A. Klopfenstein. *Marching to Zion, A History of the Apostolic Christian Church of America*, 2nd ed. (Fort Scott, Kansas: Sekan Printing Company, 2008).

Vibrant sun streamed through the notable stained-glass windows, perhaps a promise from God: “Mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually” (1 Kings 9:3). The foundation was laid for an Apostolic Christian church in the Chicagoland area.

The following pages contain accounts of individuals – likely present on that day – who established the early church. Day by day, they walked by faith on the streets of Chicago; week by week, they came together to worship at Sunnyside.

Alfred “A.F.” and Caroline Meyer [1923]

Emil and Emily (twins), Naomi, Walter, Fred, Louise and Alfred

The A.F. Meyer family – Alfred, Caroline and their seven children, originally from Morton, Illinois – played a significant role in establishing a church in Chicago. In 1923, they moved to the near west side to manage a rooming house at 207 S. California Avenue on the southeast corner of California and Adams. “The Building” – as the family affectionally called it – was a large four-story apartment complex with shops on the first floor and simple studio-like rooms above. A few blocks south on Van Buren Street they operated Meyer Restaurant.

The family occasionally attended church in Elgin, travelling by train or by car, a common practice for brethren living in the city at that time.

One ordinary December day at Meyer Restaurant, daughters Naomi and Emily served the table of a gentleman they thought they recognized as Apostolic Christian. What happened after that changed the course of history:

Brother George Yergler of LaCrosse, Indiana, brought some cattle into Chicago for market. After conducting his business, he had some time to spare until his train departed for Indiana. He thought he would walk around and perhaps find the Meyer family. His thought was that he might find some of their children playing or running around. He walked on West Van Buren and saw a sign, “Meyer Restaurant.” He went inside. Alfred’s two daughters, Naomi and Emily, waited on him. Naomi went to the kitchen and said to her mother, “I think he is one of our kind.” The mother Caroline looked out through the square window through which the food passed; she knew it was George Yergler.

She went out and invited him to stay for the evening to hold church services. She said they would call others in the area and plan to have church. The first service was held in their home, December 1925. (Interview with Fred Meyer, 1980)

Brother Yergler’s unexpected, yet fruitful, visit paved the way for regular worship services to begin for brethren who lived near the city. Once a month, they gathered to worship in Sam Clauss’s home on Flournoy Street or Chris Siebenthal’s apartment on California Avenue. Visiting ministers for the “satellite church” were provided from Elgin and Cissna Park, IL, and LaCrosse and Leo, IN, churches.

In 1929, the growing assembly rented a Union Hall building (on Fifth and San Francisco) but it was cold and poorly lit, yet costly. For several years the group then rented a vacant church building at 735 S. Sacramento Avenue. This location also had some concerns: a brother was stationed outside the building during services to watch the area.



Caroline Meyer at Meyer Restaurant



A present-day field trip to the neighborhood shows a dramatically changed environment. All the above-mentioned buildings are demolished and the roar of I-290 traffic permeates the air. In the 1920s, while the brethren were quietly living on the Near West Side, the Old Chicago Main Post Office was built on the west edge of the Loop with a hole preserved in the base as a right-of-way for a potential west side boulevard (per Daniel Burnham's 1909 city plan). The "west side boulevard" became a reality in 1955 as Congress Parkway and then was expanded multiple times to become the current Eisenhower Expressway. California Avenue is a major

interchange, three miles west of the Loop. A traffic reporter might say "...on the Eisenhower, it is six minutes out to California from the Post Office." (It still amazes me that a major thoroughfare flows under a century-old, nine-story building!)

Alfred and Caroline moved before these changes took place. Alfred, who was born in "the old country," Alsace-Lorraine, and lived in "the city" of Chicago, died in 1934 at age 54. Caroline, who later moved to Lincoln Square on the north side, lived out the remainder of her 81 years in Chicago, graciously ministering to the needs of the brethren.

This faithful couple contributed countless blessings to the early church. Not only did they provide room and board for many brothers and sisters who moved to the city, they warmly welcomed them into their hearts. It is no wonder that Caroline was called "Mother Meyer" by many. Alfred and Caroline were laid to rest in Bluff City Cemetery in Elgin.

Many of the Meyer children returned to Central Illinois as adults, but son Fred remained in the Chicagoland area, got married, and raised a family. Later in this book, you will meet several Meyer descendants: Fred and Marie, Lenny and Charlotte, Nancy, Patty, Randy, Ross, Rick and Terisa.

Sam and Mary Clauss [1925]

Sam and Mary Clauss – who had previously sold their Wolcott butcher shop and moved to an apartment near the Meyers – were present at the first services. They describe the event in a letter home to close friends, Andrew and Minnie Lehman:

January 6, 1926

Bro. George Yergler from LaCrosse was in Chicago on business that day. When he came up, he did not intend to come out here, but his train did not leave until about 12:00 A.M. After he was through with his business transactions, he got to thinking about coming up to see us. The more he thought about it the more it bothered him. He would not have felt right had he gone home without coming out.

He knew where Meyers were so he went to their Restaurant [and met Caroline Meyer]. Anna and Lydia Clauss are just a block away so he went over there a while. Meyers then took him to their house (only about one block further) and then they phoned the Hartman girls to come to the Meyers. Someone came and told us to come over, it was nearly 9 o'clock.

We went over and we had such a lovely evening. We sang a few songs and George read a chapter and preached a lovely sermon and prayed with us. He read and preached in English as there were some friends there that understood English best.

George Yergler's visit and the Clausses' existing relationship with Andrew Lehman set the stage for the next important event. Details of the subsequent meeting – in the Clausses' apartment at 2719 Flournoy Street – come from Rich Schurter's 1972 record:

In January 1926, Brother Andrew Lehman, a minister from Wolcott, came to Chicago with other brethren and held the first Sunday service at Brother Sam Clauss' apartment with about 38 members and friends attending. Elder Michael Mangold from Roanoke held the second service. Services were soon started twice a month thereafter by ministers taking turns from Elgin, LaCrosse, Leo and Cissna Park. Brother Jacob Stettner from Elgin served as Elder at that time.

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Sam and Mary's apartment was used for regular services (monthly, and then twice a month) for the small group in the area. When they appointed officers in 1930, Sam served as trustee, along with Rich Schurter and Robert Haas. He helped establish a duty fund of \$1 per month per member in 1930 to pay for rent and upkeep. Sam and Mary later moved to Elgin (date unknown).

Elgin (neighboring church) and Jacob Stettner (non-resident elder)

When the Chicago brethren started regular services in 1926, Elgin church had already been established for 45 years, largely due to employment at Elgin National Watch Factory. Elgin, which is located 35 miles northwest of Chicago where Route 20 crosses the Fox River, was a mid-sized town in the 1920s but was eventually engulfed by Chicago metropolitan area. Historic (coast-to-coast) Route 20 – a country road between the city and small town – connected the two neighboring churches. The route certainly looks different today: at times it becomes a six-lane thoroughfare and takes on a variety of names, including Lake Street, Route 12/45, Mannheim Road, La Grange Road, 95th Street and U.S. Route 41 until it crosses the Indiana border.

Brother Jacob Stettner (Elgin, IL) was given the oversight of the small gathering in Chicago.

Jacob Stettner – minister and then elder (1928) at Elgin – was given the oversight of the small gathering in Chicago. He was a man of resolute faith and propriety, awed by Chicago's size: "It's easy to get lost. You wonder if you'll ever get home" (Klopfenstein, 2008, pg. 409).

Jacob was non-resident elder for 13 years – from 1926 to 1939 – until he laid the care of the congregation onto Brother George Yergler (LaCrosse, Indiana) on November 26, 1939 at Sunnyside.

Domestic Workers

It's not fair to group these ladies together as a unit; each one has her own account, filled with character, yet collectively they defined the early church in Chicago. An entire book could be (and should be) written about the surge of young women from central Illinois and other places who sought employment as domestic workers for wealthy Chicagoans. Armed with an excellent Swiss-German work ethic, they were highly-favored, live-in employees and they were grateful for jobs during and in the aftermath of the Depression.

A typical day of a domestic included a wide variety of jobs: cooking, cleaning, daily shopping, childcare, and anything else that needed to be done in the home. After serving the family meal in the evening, she returned to her own quarters to eat. They had to be psychologically astute; their employers – especially the pampered wives – were sometimes difficult, unreasonable and unkind.

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They did not have Sundays off. They cooked the noon dinner for “their people” and then travelled by streetcar or electric trolley to church. Often, the church girls filled an entire trolley on their way to Sunnyside. Services at church were held at 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. with lunch in between to accommodate their work schedule. To extend fellowship into the evening, a large number prepared dinner for themselves in the church basement.

They added a youthful vibrancy to the church – many former children have mentioned fond memories of them as Sunday school teachers or sitting with them in the sanctuary. The children were allowed to sift through their purses during church, looking for interesting little fragrances or hankies. The benches at Sunnyside on the sisters' side were twice as long as the brothers' side, because the women outnumbered the men 2 to 1.



Elise Zimmerman

Thursdays were called “maid's day off” and were a good opportunity for mid-week services. Caroline “Mother Meyer”, who lived in Lincoln Square, prepared lovely dinners for “the working girls” on their day off. There was a lot of chatter around the extended table. The North Line train put extra cars on Thursdays to accommodate the travels of all domestics.

They took advantage of any opportunity to go home to their families. In one account, Bob Kaufmann was bringing a load of hogs to the stockyards in Chicago. After he dropped off his load, he filled the back of his truck with fresh hay and then gave his sister, Anna, and her friends a ride back to Cissna Park for a singing. The following day, they got up early, took the train from small-town Buckley to Dearborn Station and were back at work in Wilmette for the day. In another account, Leona Wiegand went to Taylor, MO, for her baptism on June 18, 1939, and then her dad drove her back to Winnetka on Sunday evening so she would not miss work.

During the war, they corresponded with men stationed overseas. In more than a few cases, the young man came home and asked for the lady's hand in marriage.

There are thirty names of domestics listed in the **1950 church directory** – the earliest document that lists the single sisters. There were as many as 60 at the peak of this period in the 1930s and 1940s. Those readers familiar with Chicago will notice the addresses of affluent neighborhoods and suburbs, mostly on the North Shore:

Laura Buettner (Winnetka)	Clara Scharlach (Winnetka)
Alma Cordill (Evanston)	Cora Scharlach (Kenilworth)
Evelyn Frey (Uptown)	Ann Schladen (the Loop)
Anna Furrer (Lake Shore Drive)	Eunice Schladen (the Loop)
Emma Gerst (Highland Park)	Anna Stoller (Wilmette)
Tillie Gerst (Lombard)	Bertha Stoller (Oak Park Avenue)
Louise Kettner (Evanston)	Clara Stoller (Oak Park Avenue)
Emma Laubscher (Humboldt Park)	Lydia Stoller (Oak Park Avenue)
Ida Laubscher (Humboldt Park)	Louise Stoller (Wilmette)
Olga Laubscher (Humboldt Park)	Leona Wiegand (Winnetka)
Estella Lehman (Norridge)	Helen Young (Kenilworth)
Emily Miller (Hinsdale)	Elizabeth Zimmerman (Highland Park)
Marie Muster (Oak Park)	Dorothy Zimmerman (Highland Park)
Rose Muster (Oak Park)	Emma Zimmerman (Lincoln Park)
Margaret Rudin (Winnetka)	Elsie Zimmerman (Lincoln Park)

As modern conveniences reduced the workload, demand for live-in domestics diminished. Most returned home to central Illinois or Indiana. A few – such as Louise Kettner – sought different employment in Chicago. Some – Louise Gerber Knecht, Esther Hartman Hay, Pauline Ramseyer Schrenk, others – married local boys and raised families. One – Clara Scharlach – remained employed as a domestic for forty years! In 1953, the worship hours at church were changed from afternoon services to the traditional hours of 10 a.m. and 12 p.m., an indication that this era had passed.

The backgrounds and talents of the women were quite varied and the specifics of their lives in Chicago are obscure. The following are a few tidbits of information about some of the individuals, with a sincere apology to families of the many, many people whose details are not recorded:

Caroline Gehrig originated from Peoria. She moved to Chicago in 1909 and was the first known Apostolic Christian living here. She returned to Peoria in 1929.

Anna and Lydia Clauss arrived in 1925, from Remington.

Alma Cordill (born in Fort Scott, Kansas) moved to Chicago 1937 and stayed 56 years until 1989; she worked as a nurse.

She volunteered at Cook County Hospital, which was in a rough neighborhood. She traveled there alone, from her Evanston home, on public transportation.

When Lenny and Charlotte Meyer helped her move, she could fit all of her earthly possessions in their station wagon. She passed in 1993 and was laid to rest in Lamar, MO.

Margaret Rudin (from Cissna Park) lived with and worked for the Pierce family in Winnetka.

When the Pierce family was out of town, she invited guests to dinner in their home. The children were permitted to very carefully tour the big house – which looked like a castle to their young eyes. According to Lenny Meyer, “It was like a museum. Mr. Pierce had bookshelves everywhere!”

Emily Miller (from Fairbury) started her domestic work in Kenilworth and continued throughout her life as a housekeeper and cook for a lady who (unfortunately) was not very nice to her. Sometimes, the wealthy took advantage of the honest, hard-working Christian girls.

She enjoyed a very close, life-long friendship with Clara and Cora Scharlach, Louise Kettner, Louise Knecht and Emma Funk.

Emily returned to Fairbury in 1970, where she passed in 1989 and was laid to rest.



Emily Miller, Edith Schrenk, Louise Knecht

Anna Furrer worked for Mr. Barr, Vice President of Illinois Central Railroad. Her “people” lived in a high rise on Lake Shore Drive that faced Lake Michigan.

She had a singing voice that carried all the way to the rafters; however, she disagreed with Ernest Knecht on the tempo of the songs. She followed her own speed while he continued at the tempo he believed it should be, which provided much entertainment for the youngsters.

As a Sunday school teacher, she was a no-nonsense type of lady. Lorna Steffen Schrock said, “When she spoke, we fell in line.”

Bertha and Persida Grusy (from Gridley). They were baptized in Sunnyside in 1937, along with five other converts – the first baptisms in the new church.

Eunice Schladenhauffen was also baptized on October 24, 1937, with Bertha and Persida Grusy.

Tillie Gerst (Oakville) was older when she moved to Chicago in 1942. She had always wanted to be a teacher so she worked as a domestic while going to school. After she received her certification, she taught for 30 years in Lombard grade schools.

She was a cook at Evanston YMCA Camp Echo during the summers. Ten-year-old Lenny Meyer recalls Tillie “coming out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron” to welcome him to camp.

She purchased a very small, 24-foot trailer in Melrose Park from Dale and Judy Eisenmann after they moved to their suburban home.

She moved away from Chicago in 1977. She passed in 2003 and was laid to rest in Oakville, Iowa.

Emma, Ida and Olga Laubscher arrived from Cissna Park in 1927 and worked in Evanston. For a brief time in the 1940s, they returned to Cissna Park to help at home while their father was ill but migrated back to Chicago in 1943.

Nancy Schrenk Schambach recalls how special it was to sit with them in church.

Emma was the housekeeper for Ida and Olga while they worked. They all lived at 5418 W. Dakin Street in Chicago. Emma passed in 1961 and was laid to rest in Cissna Park.

Olga worked for Wieboldt’s. She passed away while vacationing in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida (1979) and was also laid to rest in Cissna Park.

Ida worked for Sears, Roebuck and Co. She returned to Cissna Park in 1987; she passed in 1993 and was laid to rest next to her sisters.

Beth Fisher Meyer remembers Ida as a “very patient Sunday School teacher” who helped the students memorize the Books of the Bible.

Louise Kettner arrived from Germany in 1925 with a suitcase and “a little money.” The details of her story (later in this book) parallel the experiences of other “long-termers” that are listed here.

Anna, Cora and Louise Stoller moved from Gridley in 1937; they returned around 1956.

Rosa Stoller and her daughters Bertha, Lydia and Clara moved from Peoria to Chicago in 1933. They found employment in factory jobs. Rosa passed in 1947 and was buried in Elgin Lakewood Memorial Park. The three girls moved to California in 1953 and later returned to Elgin. They are also buried in Lakewood.

Bertha, Clara, Cora and Nettie Scharlach originated from Cissna Park; they moved to the city in 1937.

All four Scharlach sisters were a lot of fun, talented, curious about life.

Cora would tell stories: about herself, personal experiences, or anything she made up. She was very entertaining! One of her favorite dramatizations was about a return trip to Europe (post WW2) where she was attacked by a German shepherd dog – one that had obviously had been traumatized from the war.

Clara enjoyed creative arts such as clay sculpting, macramé, all of the arts. She shared many of her creations with children at church.

She was a cook and housekeeper at a BIG house. When the family was out of town, she invited children (including the Baums) to have a fancy dinner in the BIG house. There was a foot-activated bell under the table to call for kitchen help. She let the kids ring the bell for fun.

Clara worked for a couple that did not have children but the wife had a porcelain doll collection that was “her family.” Clara had to replace the dolls very carefully, exactly as the mistress wanted them on the bed or the shelves.

Nettie and Bertha returned to Cissna Park in the 1950s; Cora followed in 1964. Clara worked as a domestic until her retirement in 1977 – the longest-serving domestic in Chicago church. All four were laid to rest in Cissna Park.

Elizabeth and Dorothy Zimmerman (from Roanoke) lived on Lake Shore Drive until they moved to Highland Park with their sister’s family. Elizabeth was a nanny for the children and helped with housework; Dorothy worked at Baum’s Bakery. (See Gus and Alma Baum’s story.)

Elizabeth never used a recipe, but held them all in her head. She had learned many fancy dishes, such as French sauces, when she worked on the North Shore. One day she prepared Baked Alaska as a treat for the Baum children. Alma thought that was frivolous and a waste of ingredients.

Elizabeth and Dorothy returned to central Illinois in 1988.

Emma and Elsie Zimmerman were also from Roanoke – cousins to Dorothy and Elizabeth. Emma returned to Roanoke in 1969 but Elsie remained in Chicago until 1990. All four Zimmerman sisters were laid to rest in Roanoke.



Dorothy Zimmerman - Lois Baum - Elizabeth Zimmerman

Louise Kettner [1925]

Louise was the first convert of Chicago church; she was baptized on April 15, 1928, in Elgin church by Elder Jacob Stettner who had counseled young Louise in her time of repentance. She faithfully served the Lord for 70 years until her death in 1997.

When she first arrived in Chicago in 1925, from Germany, she had one suitcase and “a little bit of money.” She started her American life as a domestic worker for a family in Highland Park.

Leaving the domestic work, she found employment as a store clerk at Evanston’s flagship market, Chandler’s, Inc. The sprawling, two-story department store sold goods from the mundane (school supplies) to the eccentric (Crosley automobiles, ordered from a catalog). Louise worked in the unique gift-wrap section.

Louise – a kind, soft-spoken lady with a German accent – lived a simple, quiet life. She saved enough money to purchase a small home in Evanston and would often say, “I was outside walking on my land; it was a wonderful day,” after tending to flowers in the yard. She never purchased a car.

Her Evanston home at 1512 Mulford became a “room & board ministry” to many young people who came to the city for school or work: Laretta Haerr, Glen Pfeiffer, Duane Reutter, Daryl Hari, Rich Sutter, Norm Stahl, others – some for a few weeks, others for years. Louise, an excellent German cook, dished the food up herself; no pots or pans ever came to the table. No one left the table hungry, but especially on days when schnitzel was served! After dinner, she brought out Aggravation, her favorite board game.

The young people certainly knew how to make this a fun house! Laretta talked her into getting a piano and Norm built a ping pong table in the basement. Laretta Haerr Schafer describes her experience:

Louise was a very kind landlady. My room was on the south side of her house overlooking the back yard – the El track was about 15 feet away from the fence.

She allowed me to buy a piano. We had many singings and enjoyed the fellowship of others in the young group – Jim Rinkenberger, Maureen Frank, Lenny Meyer, others. She never said “no” to a singing. She seemed to look forward to them and served snacks at the end of the evening.

A special family relationship formed with young Norm Stahl, who rented a room for 3½ years. Norm, then later Gloria and their four children, became her adopted family and called her “Grandma Liesel.” Norm cared for her as his own mother, assisting with paperwork and decisions in the later years of her life; his own story comes later in this book.

Louise sold her home in 1976 and moved to Elgin for her sunset years. Liesel means “Oath to God.” She was faithful to her baptismal covenant until she passed at age 93 and was laid to rest in River Hills Memorial Park in Batavia.



Louise Kettner

Gus and Alma Baum [1935]

Lois, John and Lynnea

Baum's Bakery created the most magnificent Danish rolls you could imagine, often served for lunch at Sunnyside. Gus Baum, the creator of the delectable pastries, learned his trade in Germany when he apprenticed as a baker near Stuttgart.

Gus immigrated to America when he was 17; he worked for a farmer to pay off his sponsorship and then moved to Chicago in 1930. He started peddling eggs on a bicycle for Winzeler's Sunshine Eggs. He met Alma Zimmerman (originally from Roanoke) who worked as a live-in domestic on Lake Shore Drive. They married in 1935.

It was Alma's idea to open a bakery. They opened a simple shop on Central Avenue in Highland Park; five years later they expanded to a larger facility across the street. Over time, the bakery became a huge success, producing a dazzling array of cakes and cookies.

Gus and Alma made their home at 1738 Western in Highland Park, where Lois (1936), John (1940), and Lynnea (1943) were born. Alma's two sisters – Dorothy and Elizabeth Zimmerman – moved in with the family. Elizabeth had been employed as a domestic on the North Shore, but now the family needed her help. She was nanny for the children and ran the home. Dorothy donned a pink apron to help at the bakery one year (Christmas 1939) and remained for 30 years!

Alma left for the bakery early in the morning while Elizabeth tended to things at home. Elizabeth formed a very close bond with the children – really, she was like their mother. This close relationship lasted throughout her lifetime. When Lois got married in 1987, Elizabeth (who had long since moved on to other jobs) said to Dorothy, "Now we can leave." They moved to Metamora in 1998.



*Gus and Alma Baum
Lois, John and Lynnea*



Gus Baum with Holiday Gingerbread House

Gus and Alma spent much of their time and energy at the bakery, as did Dorothy. The popular, upscale bakery opened early for commuters to enjoy a special breakfast pastry on their walk to the train station. Gus was the talented baker; he insisted on using the very best ingredients: fresh butter, cream, eggs and flour. Alma was a capable manager; she created "the list" before she went home each evening, details for Gus to follow the next day. Dorothy greeted customers at the counter. She also learned how to operate the massive, threatening oven, with encouragement from Gus.

The children were recruited to help at the bakery, especially during their busy season between Halloween and New Year's. Every year, Gus crafted a spectacular, gingerbread Swiss Chalet for display, which was a special delight for holiday window shoppers.

The Baum's home was nestled in dense woods where the houses were far apart. They would take long walks along their road, looking for wild strawberries, raspberry and blackberry patches, birds, and animals – extremely fun for the kids!

Their house was just across the tracks from Fort Sheridan where over 500,000 men and women spent time during WW2. Sounds of military activities came from the camp: soldiers marching and a steady stream of bugle calls. Lois recalls the somber feeling of hearing Taps played each night. Sometimes soldiers with church connections (e.g. Lee Blunier, from Indiana) would walk to their home for dinner when they had time off.

Gus and Alma sold the bakery in 1965 and moved to Minnesota; Gus fished and Alma tended to her prize-winning garden. They both passed in 1998 and were laid to rest in Roanoke near the Zimmerman family, including Dorothy and Elizabeth.

Lois Baum Krupp, who presently lives on Lake Shore Drive, had a successful music career, as co-host/producer of WFMT Lyric Opera Broadcast of Chicago. John recently retired to Virginia from California where he raised his family. Lynnea Rosner lives in northern Vermont.

Robert and Margaret Haas [1925]

Richard, Robert, Margaret, Mary, John (stillborn), Ruth, Millie, Gert, Paul and Anne

Millie was only five weeks old when she was carried in her mother's arms to church, her first outing as a baby. But this was no ordinary Sunday! It was the first worship services in the newly-purchased and remodeled church building on Sunnyside Avenue.

The young child is now known as Millie Leman, our faithful sister tenderly caring for her husband, Paul. The faithfulness of her parents, Robert and Margaret Haas, and that is now evident in Millie, is the fruit of their devotion to God and dedication to the budding Chicago congregation.

Robert and Margaret Haas were the first converts of Chicago, along with Louise Kettner. They came to the knowledge of their Lord while worshipping with brethren in homes on the near west side. Because no baptismal was available, Robert and Margaret were baptized – on Easter Sunday 1928 – in LaCrosse church; young Louise was baptized one week later in Elgin.



*Robert and Margaret Haas
Richard, Robert, Margaret, Mary, Ruth, Millie, Gert, and Paul*

As a child, Robert acquired his notable work ethic as well as valuable machinist skills while helping at his family's machine shop in Germany. Both attributes helped him immensely after immigrating to America as a young man. He briefly labored on a farm in Fairbury to work off his sponsorship before moving to Chicago for employment as a tool and die-maker. Similarly, Margaret Keller was quite skilled as a cook because she had worked alongside her family in a German bakery; she was employed by a wealthy family in Oak Park.

Robert and Margaret met in Chicago and married in 1926. At an earlier time, Margaret had lived with Barbara Merkel (a sister in Peoria) so their simple wedding was in Barbara's home.

After marriage, events for this young couple occurred quickly! While living in Oak Park, they welcomed baby Richard in 1927, were baptized in 1928, and then found room for three more babies – Robert (1929), Margaret (1930) and Mary (1932). In 1934, misfortune fell upon them when they buried baby John, who was stillborn.

As if they weren't busy enough, Robert was placed in the ministry in August 1936, along with Eli Winzeler, Jr. Meanwhile, the backyard gathered three additional playmates – Ruth (1936), Millie (1937) and Gert (1938).

Because Robert had an excellent job at Harig Tool and Die Manufacturing, the large family did not suffer financially during the Depression, as many did in those days. They purchased a large home in affluent Elmhurst, which is where Paul (1940) and Anne (1944) joined the family.

Sundays were special for the Haas clan. They piled into their 4-door DeSoto and drove into the city for church. All eight children sat quietly beside their mother while Dad preached. According to Millie, "No toys, no crayons, we dare not misbehave!" The good behavior was occasionally rewarded by single sister Frieda Zimmerman, who took them on a walk to the nearby ice cream shoppe over noon hour.

*"No toys, no
crayons, we dare
not misbehave!"*

Robert's "progressive" preaching style was developed in part through his relationship with Arnold Pfau, who had an amazing knowledge of scripture. (Arnold's colorful character is better developed later in this book.) Every night at dinner, Robert had a prayer at the table, read the Bible and they talked about the Word. He especially enjoyed the book of Revelation.

Robert loved the outdoors, including all types of plants and animals. He built a house for rabbits in the backyard of their Elmhurst house, but the suburbs did not provide enough space for the couple who loved being outside. In 1944, they purchased acreage in South Elgin where the children could run and play, and learn the 'good ole German work ethic' by caring for the cows, goats, rabbits, horses and chickens. But not pigs – never pigs – Robert did not like pigs!

From South Elgin, Robert took the train into the city for his job but the family transferred their church membership to Elgin congregation. Although this ended their time in Chicago church, they remained good friends with the brethren and visited often.

Robert, who lived to be 102 years old, and his dear helpmate, Margaret, were laid to rest in the cemetery behind Elgin church. Their large family is dispersed around the country, but Paul and Millie Leman returned to Chicago church in 1964. Their story comes later in this book.

Henry Gerst, Sr. [minister, 1930 to 1931]

Henry Gerst, Sr., was a minister from Oakville, Iowa, who moved to Chicago in June 1930 after he lost everything in the Great Depression; his wife, Barbara, remained in Oakville. He served in the ministry while employed in Chicago and then returned to his family in April 1931. (Grandson Arnie Gerst later served in the Chicago ministry as well.)

Howard and Esther Hay [1927] MaryLu and Billy



Esther Hartman - 1927

“It was a big year for Esther and for Babe Ruth, who hit 60 home runs in 1927.” Billy Hay used these words to describe the year his mother, Esther Hartman Hay, moved from Fairbury to Chicago, adding “She took to the city like duck to water.” For the next 64 years, she confidently used public transportation – streetcars, buses, Loop Elevated (the “L”), commuter railroads, all forms of CTA – to navigate her world, even in later years when macular degeneration clouded her vision. Ultimately, she became a guiding light, a pillar of faith, and a place of refuge, as she passed on these skills – as well as life lessons – to dozens of young people who followed her pioneering path.

Esther Hartman, along with her older sister Mary, settled on the North Side, taking an apartment with Minnie Winger from Cissna Park. She worked as a nanny for the Wolfson family, a wealthy Jewish couple on the North Shore. Esther and her friends rode the streetcar to Sunday services at Sunnyside at 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. after ending the morning domestic duties of their employers.

She attended evening classes in bookkeeping and accounting, eventually taking an assignment with B.F. Goodrich Tire and Rubber Co. Having been needed at home for farm chores, she had never finished high school but always had a knack for figures and numbers. Later in life, at age 72, she passed the equivalency exam for her G.E.D. high school diploma and proudly wore cap and gown across the stage as the oldest graduate!

In the height of the Depression, Esther and her beau, Howard Hay, reasoned that “two could live as cheaply as one.” Howard had come to Chicago from Springfield to pursue a career in office management; he met Esther at a house party and they dated for two years and were married in 1933. They rented an apartment on Kenmore Avenue (Uptown neighborhood) and then a one-bedroom apartment at 4430 N. Seeley, just down the street from Sunnyside, where MaryLu (1938) and Billy (1943) joined the family. Billy and MaryLu were given the bedroom, while Howard and Esther slept on the pull-down Murphy-style bed in the living room.

Esther recognized her need for a Savior and was baptized in 1949. Howard, who had already been baptized in a Springfield Baptist church, did not “join the church with her” (Billy’s words). Together they made Sunnyside their home church.

Billy and MaryLu found special relationships in Sunday school. Franklin Fisher says, “Billy was my pal. He was very bright and I knew he would be successful in life.” Bill was indeed highly successful. He founded Chicago-based Hay and Company and also established Vincent on Leadership: The Hay Project at DePaul University.



*Howard and Esther Hay
MaryLu and Billy*

Howard and Esther were married for 29 years before purchasing their first home, a three-flat at 5110 W. Byron Street (Portage Park neighborhood). They spent numerous hours renovating it; MaryLu and her family occupied the second floor and Howard used the basement apartment for his home office. After Howard’s untimely death in 1968, Esther used the apartment building to welcome and care for countless young people who came to the city: Ruth Schumacher, Diane Olson, Bill Zbinden, and others.

Esther was convinced that she stayed young by “keeping these kids around.” Not only did she always have someone living with her, she filled her table with guests on Sunday afternoons, engaging in lively, animated discussions with them. If I recall correctly, she was a Democrat and followed the Cubs.

As she aged, Esther relied on others – Meyers, Metzgers, and Knapps – to provide transportation to church in the suburbs. They had fun asking her questions of the past: “What do you remember about Al Capone?” The infamous gangster, who allegedly ordered the deadly 1929 Valentine’s Day Massacre just two years after Esther arrived in Chicago, was buried near Hillside church in Mount Carmel Cemetery on Wolf Road.

Esther gave up her home in 1991 and returned to Fairbury to be closer to nieces and nephews. At age 96, she went to her eternal rest and was buried next to her beloved Howard at Fairview Memorial Park in Northlake.

Much of this information comes from a Tribute written by William “Billy” Hay, who credits his mother as the most influential person in his life. He passed in 2018 and was laid to rest next to his parents and his sister, MaryLu, who passed in 1984.



Boyd Metzger assists Esther down the steps, en route to church.

Ernest and Louise Knecht [1925] Ernie, John and Penny

“Let’s sing #11 yet.” These words often came from the pews as the ministers were exiting the pulpit. Ernest Knecht, who had offered the suggestion, used his pitch pipe to find the right note and then led the congregation – slowly – through the beautiful hymn “The Union in Jesus’ Death.” He was never in a hurry to get to the end of a song.

We, who in God’s name are here assembled,
Solemnly do clasp our hands;
That Christ’s death and suffering be remembered,
Faithfully for Him to stand.

Thus, in unison our hearts have spoken.
Lord, to show Thy favor give the token;
Speak thy blessing ever true.

“Amen.” Peace – be unto you! (Zion’s Harp, #11)

Ernest’s manner of life demonstrated these words. Still today it is our practice to sing #11 at the close of Communion services and greet all the brethren. Perhaps Ernest contributed to the origin of that particular tradition.

Ernest got to Chicago via his friendship with Rich Schurter. Ernest and Rich – both born in Switzerland – met as young men in Rockville, Connecticut, moved to Chicago in 1925, and eventually raised their families in the same neighborhood on the northwest side of Chicago.



*Ernest and Louise Knecht
John and Penny*

Ernest met Louise Gerber while she was working as a live-in domestic in Lake Forest. In 1941, they were married in her hometown of Bremen, Indiana. Together they made their home on 5706 N. Merrimac Avenue in Norwood Park.

One year into their marriage they welcomed Ernest Larry into their hearts and then grieved deeply eighteen months later when little Ernie got strep throat, went into convulsions and died, an event that moved Louise to tears well into her 90's. John was born in 1945; Penny in 1947.

Ernest was employed as a machinist at J.J. Tourek Manufacturing Company – an oversized factory on Kilbourn. Louise, who managed the finances and activities at home, maintained close friendships with her domestic friends and employers. Penny describes her mother's work:

My mother cooked for the Ridgeways (Cora Scharlach's employer) on maids' day out and helped with large dinner parties. She was always a great cook and soon, through word of mouth, people asked for Louise to do their parties. My mother started a very good catering business. As a teenager, I (of course) had to help. She also hired the Laubscher girls for large events. She did very well.

The whole family was quite accomplished in music. At home, they sang hymns together around the piano. John and Penny sang duets in special programs at church and were in mixed choir at school. They learned how to yodel Swiss songs when they visited Grandma Knecht in Switzerland. Penny quipped, "John was much more talented than me." He continued music in college and later joined a long-standing Barbershop group. Ernest faithfully led *a cappella* singing at church and Louise found time to join an all-city PTO choir.

Deeply rooted in the old Swiss culture, Ernest wanted to make sure things were done "the right way" and freely offered his counsel to the young people at church, balanced by fun-loving Louise who had a gift of laughter. She would get mixed up and then laugh at herself on her frequent blunders.

Ernest passed in 1974, leaving a legacy "faithfully for Him to stand." Louise navigated life in Chicago without him for 20 years before moving to Rockford to be closer to daughter Penny France. The Belvidere brethren took her under their care until her death in 2002. Ernest and Louise were laid to rest, next to little Ernie, in Eden Memorial Gardens in Schiller Park. John, a life-long Chicago resident, succumbed to Parkinson's disease in 2019.

Rich and Aldenne Schurter [1928] Ken, Ron and Leon

Rich Schurter went to church every chance he could! His deep bass voice carried the singing and he offered some of the most powerful prayers, truly from the heart. His son Leon says, "He was a true blessing to the church and to his sons."

Huldreich "Rich" Schurter was born in Switzerland and immigrated to America when he was 20. He found his salvation and was baptized the year he lived in Rockville, Connecticut and then moved to Chicago in 1928.

Aldenne Grusy was born in Gridley, Illinois, and sought employment in Chicago in 1936 with her two sisters, Bertha and Persida. Aldenne was the cook and her sisters were housekeepers for Mr. Dubbs, a multi-millionaire in Wilmette. They had a great view of Lake Michigan from the mansion where they lived.



Rich and Aldenne Schurter

Rich and Aldenne joined their hearts together in marriage in 1937 and purchased a bungalow at 5813 N. Markham Avenue. Three sons – Ken (1938), Ron (1940) and Leon (1945) – turned the home into a lively place! They went to school at nearby Hitch Elementary and Taft High School and enjoyed a dual church/school relationship with good friends John and Penny Knecht. The Ernest Knecht family lived less than a mile away.

From their home in Jefferson Park, they could walk to the North Branch of the Chicago River, a fun place for the boys to explore. Ron asked Lenny Meyer to join him on a Sunday afternoon adventure that did not turn out well. Lenny describes the ice-skating escapade:

We hid our shoes in a hollow tree, put on our skates and started down the frozen river. The temperature was probably not much below freezing. In about ten minutes, we started racing each other – I was in front of Ron. Ahead of me, I saw water running out of a pipe, making the ice very thin. I stopped but Ron skated past me and fell through the ice into shoulder-deep freezing water. He was able to climb out onto the bank. We ran through the woods (with our skates on) and knocked on the door of a house. The kind lady invited us in, gave Ron some dry clothes, and gave us both a warm drink while I called my dad. Everything turned out okay and Ron was not hurt – except for maybe his pride.

Rich served many years as treasurer and trustee for the Chicago congregation, but more importantly, he stood as a faithful pillar of the young flock. He embraced new converts with loving, gracious words at their testimonies. Aldenne was most comfortable serving in the kitchen. She was known for her loving hospitality, not only at church but also in her home where she frequently prepared leg of lamb for her table of guests.

For over 35 years, Rich was employed at Aero Motor Windmill Co. in Chicago, commissioned as foreman in the machine shop. In 1965, Aero Motor had financial difficulties, laid off many employees (including the president) and relocated to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Fortunately, Rich had skills to set up the new factory operation and was willing to accept their re-location offer. Rich and Aldenne rented an apartment in Oklahoma for 15 months and then returned to their bungalow on Markham Avenue. Rich then found employment with Carter Precision Company where he worked until his death in 1977.



AT SUNDAY SCHOOL PICNIC

Back: Ron Schurter, Billy Hay, Nancy Lehmann

Middle: Leon Schurter, John Knecht

Front: Penny Knecht



Ken, Ron and Leon Schurter (with their paper route)

Such a beautiful couple! The verse “For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers” (1Cor 4:15) was shared at Rich’s funeral in January 1977. Six months later, Aldenne joined him in eternal rest. They were laid to rest in Congerville.

Ken passed (too young, at age 52) from a heart condition; his last residence was in New Jersey. Ron moved to California, followed by Leon where they raised their families. Leon expresses a deep appreciation for Sunnyside: “The church instilled great values in those who grew up there.”

Gottlieb and Emily Lehmann [1924] Esther, John and Nancy

Gottlieb and Emily Lehmann dearly loved and supported the Chicago congregation for over 60 years. They met in Chicago in 1926, built a life together in the city, and then moved to Elgin in 1986.

Gottlieb was born in the Black Forest region of Germany, where he learned the trade of machinery, and came to Chicago in 1924. Emily Lauser had quite an immigration journey. From Heidelberg, Germany, she travelled to Rio De Janeiro where she stayed with her sister, Berta, for a year and then came to Chicago in 1925. On a post-war trip back home (in 1949) she was stunned to see bombed-out buildings and piles of debris in her beloved Heidelberg.



*Emily Lehmann
Esther, John and Nancy*

They met in Chicago and were married May 27, 1933 at the City Hall. They celebrated with angel food cake, strawberries, and whipped cream in their new apartment with Aunt Hilda and Uncle Otto, using a crate for the table.

During the depression, Gottlieb worked as a janitor at Sears, Roebuck and Co. Emily's domestic experience was a challenging one for her but the money she earned helped them purchase a house for \$5000 without a loan, at 3046 N. Natchez. Gottlieb later found employment as machinist at the oversized manufacturing plant Stewart-Warner Corporation, which was famous for making speedometers for Ford Model T's.

They welcomed Esther (1934), John (1936), and Nancy (1942) into their family.

The family put on their "Sunday best" (including hats) when they took the 45-minute drive to church. Esther, John, and Nancy had a few friends in Sunday school, held in the basement dining room. Nancy describes the scene:

All of the students stood together to sing, then climbed over the benches to sit at one of the three long tables. Joan Wagler, Nancy Schrenk and I were often in the same class. John Schrenk was one of the teachers.

Lessons had to be completed in time to clear the tables for lunch – a "carbohydrate feast" – with jelly-filled donuts, long-johns, an array of bakery items, and coffee. There was always coffee!

For special occasions, the students memorized poems and songs for Sunday school programs in the sanctuary, rewarded with a treat bag filled with fruit, nuts and candy.

Emily sought her salvation in 1940; with young eyes, Esther (age 6) and John (age 4) watched their mother's baptism and then followed her faith footsteps and were baptized as teenagers.

This dear family suffered personally from a damaging conflict within the church. Esther participated in Youth for Christ and attended Moody Bible Institute. The church was not supportive of these choices, nor was her mother, who embraced "the way things were done back in Germany." In that church era, Esther had to choose between church membership or Christian education and mission work. She became a missionary nurse in Manorom, Thailand.

Gottlieb had a calm and positive nature but Emily was more excitable. As dementia affected her aging nervous system, Gottlieb would put his reassuring arm around her and say, “It’s going to be okay, dear.”

They lived out their sunset years at Highland Oaks in Elgin. Gottlieb passed in May 1991; Emily a few months later. Nancy Samuelson, who lives in South Dakota, said, “It was no surprise; they did everything together.” John calls Florida home and Esther Coady lives in England.



Gottlieb and Emily Lehmann

Minnie Lehman [1930]

Edward, Estella [1927], Karl, Irvin and Eugene

This story begins with Andrew Lehman, a minister from Wolcott, who never resided in Chicago. Andrew and his wife, Minnie, visited Chicago in January 1926 to conduct the first Sunday services – held in Sam Clauss’s apartment. From this time forward, Chicago was a “satellite church” that was served by ministers (such as Andrew) from Wolcott, Leo, and LaCrosse, Indiana, and Elgin and Cissna Park, Illinois, until it became an established congregation with resident ministers.

Because of financial difficulties during the Depression, the family had to release their homestead in Indiana, prompting three sons – Karl, Irvin, and Eugene – to find jobs in the city; each has their own account later in this book. Daughter Estella also relocated to Chicago. One year after Andrew passed, his widow, Minnie, moved to Chicago to join her adult children. (Edward never moved to Chicago.)



Estella Lehman

Estella sought employment in 1927, initially as a domestic. She was a “go-getter,” someone who was always up and busy doing good things. Later, she was employed by Review Advertising, a printing business owned by her brother, Eugene.

For many years, Estella kept detailed records of church dinners. The records have disappeared (unfortunately) but they most certainly contained the word “wieners”, which were the mainstay meat of church dinners – easy to keep and easy to fix for large crowds.

When Mother Minnie moved to the city in 1930, she lived on the top floor of a two-flat at 4216 Wilcox in West Garfield Park. She faithfully served the brethren with her home and generous hospitality. Numerous guests “had their feet under her table” at some point and she provided room and board for many, including Anna Farney, Tillie Gerst, Emerson and Reuben Kercher, Mabel and

Josephine Abersoll, Ernest Knecht, and others.

Minnie lived in Chicago until her death in 1949 and was buried next to Andrew in Wolcott. Estella remained in Chicagoland area for 56 years; her last address was 4124 N. Oketo in Norridge where she died in 1963. She was laid to rest in Wolcott.



*Minnie's Home
4216 Wilcox (Garfield Park)*

Eugene and LaVirra Lehman [1931] Dennis

Eugene Lehman and his printing business, Lehman, Inc., is to be commended for his contribution to this history book. Starting in 1950, he dutifully printed church directories and saved a copy of every one of them! The fragile box of records, tucked in a dusty corner cabinet at church, is a wealth of information of bygone days.

Eugene moved to Chicago in 1930 with his mother, Minnie. They lived with his siblings Estella and Karl who already had an apartment on West Congress Street. They quickly moved out of this apartment when the bed bugs arrived! The residential area was wiped out when Congress Expressway – later known as “the Eisenhower” – was built.

Like many others, Eugene had difficulty finding a job during the Depression but he took advantage of several entrepreneurial opportunities: janitor, egg salesman for Eli Winzeler, cut-rate milk store, service station, and then a factory worker at Industrial Condenser/Speaker factory which was owned by Jess Gudeman.

He met a lovely young girl in the neighborhood, LaVirra Marshall, and married her in 1936. Dennis was born in 1940.

LaVirra helped support family finances with a job at Mars Candy Factory, lifting heavy cartons of candy bars which were sent to army camps. Since the men were off at war, the women had to fill the factory jobs back home. In an interesting but sad incident, LaVirra was notified at the factory one day that her brother, Claude, an Allied bombardier, was missing in action over The Hump (Himalayan Mountains) in India. He was never heard from again.

Eugene loved to write. He took several correspondence courses, bought a typewriter, and submitted countless articles to magazines. In spite of multiple rejection slips, he persisted and was paid enough to support his hobby while LaVirra put bread on the table. At one point, he noticed one of his articles printed in a magazine but not with his name on it: his work had been plagiarized by an inmate in the Michigan State Penitentiary!

His interest in writing ultimately launched a successful career in printing. He started a small neighborhood newspaper *North Austin Review*, and then progressed to printing and mailing catalogs for local businesses, finally turning the business into Review Advertising. The printing business expanded to include ink and office supply sales and was named Lehman, Inc.

Dennis joined the printing business directly out of high school but was struck by a deadly melanoma in 1978; he passed too young at age 38. His dear wife, Virginia, continued with the family business in Elk Grove Village and tenderly loved her in-laws as her own parents. (Virginia's second husband, Wayne Giza, became a dear family member as well.) At present, Virginia continues to operate the 60-years-running business.

Eugene was the author of a delightful, long-standing Chicago tradition: Mr. Peter's Annual Potluck held at Mr. Peter's Banquet Hall in Mount Prospect. Eugene supplemented the cost of dinner consisting of chicken breasts and twice-baked potatoes and then entertained the diners with clever stories and silly “Eugene-isms.” It was a perfect setting to celebrate special birthdays or anniversaries.



Eugene and LaVirra Lehman

Eugene and LaVirra collected clocks – hundreds of clocks! Their last residence at 1713 Meacham Road in Palatine was a museum of clocks. In later years, LaVirra gifted clocks to children as an expression of her love.

Eugene passed in 2004 and was laid to rest in Memorial Gardens Cemetery in Arlington Heights. Three years later, LaVirra was baptized – at age 87 – in Hillside. She passed in 2012 and was laid to rest next to her dear Eugene.

Irvin and Dorothy Lehman [1930] Gene, Wanda, Dianne and Donna

Irvin Lehman left the family farm in Wolcott, Indiana, to seek employment in the city in 1930. At the same time, Dorothy Wagler moved to Chicago with her family - Will and Emma Wagler, from Morton.

Irvin and Dorothy were married in 1935 and made their home at 4026 West Monroe Street, west of Garfield Park. This is where Gene (1936), Wanda (1939), Dianne (1942) and Donna (1943) were born.

It was difficult to find work at the 1930s. Irvin took every opportunity to provide for his growing family. With his brother, Eugene, he tried a few business ventures: gas station, cut-rate milk store, and egg merchants for Eli Winzeler. He also worked at Madigan's Department Store on Madison Street and as a service man for gas-electric generators at Ready Power Company.

The family rode the streetcar to church, passing the Cracker Jack Factory on 66th Street. With the backdrop of the war, they sometimes saw soldiers exercising on the streets. In those days, many things were rationed, including sugar, but delicious donuts were still served for church lunch.



Irvin and Dorothy Lehman



Gene, Wanda and Dianne Lehman

Gene's memories of Sunnyside range from silly, sliding on the slick floor in the basement, to sacred: peering out the stained-glass windows, wondering how he could "rise to see an everlasting prize." ("Sweet Hour of Prayer," Hymns of Zion, #215) The spiritual foundation laid in the young lad sprung forth years later as he served in the Wolcott ministry for many years.

In 1944, Irvin and Dorothy moved to Kentland, Indiana, with their young family but often returned to visit family still living in the city.

Karl and Minnie Lehman [1928]

Karl Lehman left the struggling family farm in Wolcott and moved to Chicago in 1928. Around the same time, Minnie Winger left Cissna Park to find work in the city as a domestic. They met through church fellowship, went on double-dates with her roommate, Esther Hartman, and Howard Hay, and were married in 1933.

Karl's first job was downtown, in the historic twelve-story Fair Store located on the corner of State and Adams (later bought out by Montgomery Wards). After some additional job changes, Karl became store manager for National Tea Company. He took a risk when his brother, Eugene, needed help in the printing business: Karl quit his promising job at National Tea and went to work for Review Advertising where he remained for 23 years until his retirement. Minnie also worked for Eugene's printing business for a brief time but spent most of her career at All-State Insurance, where she was always in good hands.

They were baptized February 13, 1949 in the basement of Sunnyside. Young Peter Ernst was also baptized that day.

Karl and Minnie – who never had children – took many young people under their wings. Minnie considered her family the largest because “they adopted all the young people” who came to Chicago. Likewise, they shared an extremely close relationship with their nephew Dennis, treating him as a son. Beth Fisher Meyer says it succinctly, “They sure made me feel special.”

Karl served as church treasurer for many years. When the congregation was transitioning from the city to the suburbs, he served on the Hillside building committee, along with Ralph Klopfenstein, Paul Leman and Sam Slagel.

Over the years, they lived in several apartments in Chicago, owned a home in Skokie for many years and then retired to an apartment at Highland Oaks in Elgin. He passed in 1991; Minnie in 1994. They were laid to rest in her hometown, Cissna Park.



Karl and Minnie Lehman

Herman and Della Stoller [1930] Harold, Floyd, Charles and Jerry

Herman Stoller needed a job. Shortly after the stock market crash in October 1929, he moved to Chicago with his new bride, Della, and two young sons, Harold and Floyd. He had already suffered much when he buried the boys' mother, Pearl Eisenmann Stoller, who died from complications of an appendix infection. Now Della had joined the family. The four clung together for hope as they moved to the city for a job. At the same time, Herman's mother, Rosa, and his three sisters also moved to Chicago – their story is elsewhere in this book.

Soon Herman and Della were a family of six: Charles “Chuck” was born in 1931; Jerry in 1935. Della had her hands full with four boys!

Herman started a simple egg business out of the back of his car. Early in the morning, he drove to farms along Route 24 to pick up eggs and then returned to Ma and Pa Shops in the city, delivering fresh eggs for their shelves. (Eli Winzeler, who also sold eggs, was a trusted advisor; his story comes later.) The farmers on Route 24 knew they could trust Herman rather than the “crooked ones” in Chicago. He did all of his business with cash.

The business grew from a car to a trailer to two trucks, in due course named “Stoller and Sons.” When the boys were not in school, their youthful energy was put to use to climb up and down the trucks on deliveries.

Around the time that the war started, they purchased a small 40-acre farm east of Barrington. The younger boys had to shoulder more responsibilities on the farm since the older sons left for the war efforts. Floyd enlisted in the navy and was stationed overseas in the Pacific. Harold got a job as a welder at the quickly-erected “Prairie Shipyard” in Seneca, 40 miles west of Chicago, building LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank). The completed landing ships were launched on the Illinois River and sent downstream to the Mississippi, then off to war. Twenty-three of the monstrous, Seneca-built LSTs joined in the D-Day assault.

Back home on the farm, young Chuck and Jerry were kept busy with chores. Herman started a laying flock each fall with 1800 pullets; the baby chicks were shipped by railroad express so they had to be at the station when the chicks arrived.

Herman was a smart man who read *Chicago Tribune*, listened to the radio and loved to discuss politics. Although Della was a great homemaker, she preferred to be outdoors helping on the farm. Chuck often wonders, “How in the world did the woman do it all?” And she made sure they understood what the Bible said about sin and its consequences: “She preached us boys up one side and down the other.”

*“She preached us
boys up one side
and down the other.”*

They sold their small Barrington farm and purchased farm ground south of Mundelein which they later sold off for a housing development. (One of the results of this development, “the third parcel on the east side of the tracks,” is where Virg and Mary Metzger raised their family.) Around this time, the Stollers made Elgin their home church because it was closer.

Herman and Della had several other moves in the Chicagoland area but enjoyed their final years together in Bloomington, where Herman passed away in 1987. Della moved to Elgin and passed in 1999. They are laid to rest in Lakewood Memorial Park in Elgin.

Harold married Mary Ellen Alt; together they made Chicago their home church. They were baptized in Sunnyside in 1944 and then moved downstate.

Floyd married Bette Cole in 1943. They lived in Berwyn where their four children were born: Carol (1945), Kathy (1947), Claudia (1949) and Guy (1954) provided youthful vigor to Sunnyside. The family moved to California in 1955.

Chuck married Ella Gudeman in Elgin where they resided. They returned to Chicago church in 1984; their story comes later.

Jerry made Houston, Texas, his home; he built his plant supplier business into a worldwide provider. He passed in 2019.

Edith Schrenk [1935]

Helen, Reuben, Elmer, Frances, Martha, John, Raymond and Henry



Edith Schrenk on Francisco Avenue

Edith Schrenk – following her adult children – moved to the city in 1935; the extended family often lived together. Edith's first home at 3745 Sheffield in the Lake View neighborhood, was a two-minute walk from Wrigley Field. Soon after, she moved to a classic, brick apartment in Irving Park on 4129 N. Francisco Avenue. The original Francisco Avenue buildings remain today, a reminder of days gone by: iconic, three-flat apartments on one side of the street (affordable housing for immigrants) and single-family bungalows (with modest lawns) on the other side.

Edith – called “Mother Schrenk” by those around her – was a kind, hospitable sister and matriarch of a large family. At times, she had to step into the role of midwife! All of her children migrated to the city in the 1930s except the oldest daughter, Helen. Each one has their own story:

Reuben and his wife, Gladys, welcomed baby Rosemary in 1939. He died in 1981 in the Glenview vicinity.

Elmer married Delila in 1937; they welcomed Richard (1938) and Thomas (1941) while living in Chicago. They moved to a dairy farm in Alto, Michigan, in 1943. In later years, Elmer served in the ministry in

Alto; his son Thomas ministered in Athens, Alabama. (Richard returned to Chicago in 1961 with Janice (Winzeler); their story comes later.)

Daughter Frances “Frannie” lived with her mother many decades; together they operated a boarding house in the Francisco three-flat. In 1970 they moved to Tucson, Arizona; Franny passed in 1994 and was laid to rest in Lexington, Ohio.



Reuben and Gladys

Martha “Martie” married James Grivet; they were long-time members of Chicago church. Martie was baptized (1972) in Sunnyside – Dale Eisenmann’s first baptism – and Jim was baptized (1976) in Hillside. He passed in 1983. Later, Martie moved to Mansfield, Ohio, where she passed in 2000. They were laid to rest in Lexington Cemetery, Ohio.



Martha “Martie” and Jim Grivet

John retailed eggs door to door when he first moved to Chicago in 1933, then apprenticed as a baker with his brother, Raymond (see below). For fifty years, John and his dear wife, Pauline, made Chicago their home church where they raised their three daughters; their story comes later.

Raymond and his wife, Daisy, welcomed sons Arthur (1942) and Harold (1945) while Raymond apprenticed at Baum’s Bakery. From 1946 to 1948, Raymond and his brother, John, ran a successful bakery on Chicago Avenue. They parted ways when Raymond and Daisy moved their family to California.

Henry was a teenager when he moved to Chicago with his mother. He was baptized in Sunnyside in 1939 then married Ora Ott in 1948 in Sabetha, Kansas. They welcomed sons Loren (1948) and Wayne (1949) to the Francisco Avenue basement apartment. The family moved to Phoenix in 1955. (Presently, Loren serves in the ministry in the St. Louis, Missouri, congregation.)

Each spring, Edith presented a little challenge to the grandchildren: “Who can spot the first robin?” Edith always won! Long after her children had fledged from their Chicago home, she moved to Tucson, Arizona, in 1970, completing 35 years of faithful service as “Mother Schrenk.” She passed in 1972 and was laid to rest in Lexington, Ohio.

Ernst and Pauline Schambach [1930] Helen and Ernie

Ernst Schambach “changed the tires on the trains” – an important job that kept the trains running during the war. Each train wheel has an exterior piece of iron that wears down over time. When heated, it can be popped off and replaced with a new “tire” that cools and then hugs the wheel. Ernst learned this skill in Germany before he immigrated to America in 1923.

When Ernst first arrived on American soil, he lived and worked in Lester, Iowa, to pay off his sponsorship to the Feucht family and then he moved to Chicago where he met Pauline Kuebler. Pauline, also born in Germany, was working off her sponsorship as a domestic for the Danner family in Bartlett. They married in 1931 and welcomed baby Helen in 1933.

As a new immigrant, he found employment as a baker in Chicago. For a brief time, they moved downstate where he worked at a bakery in Morton. Son Ernie was born (1937) in Peoria.



Ernst and Pauline Schambach, Helen

After WW2 started and the need for rail services increased, they returned to Chicago where Ernst could use his train skills; he was employed by Milwaukee Railroad. They lived in Bensenville at 108 E. Pine to be near Bensenville Yard. During the war, the rural locomotive shed in Bensenville expanded to a large freight yard with over 70 directional tracks. Adjacent to the yard, Douglas Aircraft purchased an orchard to build a military aircraft factory and airfield for the war efforts. Ernst would hardly recognize the present-day area: ten thousand acres of buildings, runways and tracks – occupied by Bensenville Yard and O’Hare International Airport! (Luggage tags labeled ORD make reference to the orchard that provided land for O’Hare.)



*Wilbert and Helen Knobloch
Wedding - August 15, 1951*

Pauline and her daughter Helen (age 16) were baptized on the same day – May 8, 1949 – in Sunnyside. Meanwhile, a young man (Wilbert Knobloch, from Lester, Iowa) had moved to Chicago to save money to buy a farm. He also found a wife – young Helen agreed to marry him at age 18!

The small Sunnyside church could not accommodate Wilbert’s large family – he had 15 siblings – so their wedding was in Lester on August 15, 1951. The Schambachs – who never owned a car and could ride on the train for free – travelled by rail to the wedding. Three days after the wedding, Wilbert was

deployed to Korea where he served as a combat medic. Helen returned to Bensenville with her parents.

Helen worked for Illinois Bell – and happily welcomed Wilbert home from Korea after four years. Dietrich was born in 1958. Wilbert saved every penny he made at Johnson and Johnson and finally realized his dream of buying a farm. The small family moved to Lester in 1961, where Rita was born in 1963.

Ernie met and married Annette Beutel in Tremont. When they lived near his parents in Bensenville, they provided transportation to Sunnyside. Audrey was born in 1970, Denise in 1972. Ernie and Annette eventually moved to Marengo where Ernie passed in 2014; Annette now resides in Tremont.

Father Ernst passed in 1962 and was laid to rest in Bartlett Cemetery. A few years later, Pauline moved to Lester to be near Helen's family. She passed in 1997 and was laid to rest next to her dear Ernst in Bartlett.

Eli and Ida Winzeler [1933]

Raymond, Richard, Viola, James and Dorothy

It was a significant day for Chicago church – May 1, 1933 – when Eli and Ida Winzeler moved to Lincoln Square with their large family: Raymond (18), Richard (16), Viola (14), James (8), and Dorothy (10 months). For fourteen years they provided abundant energy and growth to the congregation.

The Winzeler home – a large, two-story house at 4526 N. Winchester Avenue – was typically busy and full of visitors. Ida, a wonderful cook and gracious hostess, frequently prepared Sunday dinner for 20 or more people in the formal dining room. Ida's well-used dining room set, which they purchased second-hand in Chicago, is preserved by granddaughter Shari Fiechter (Bluffton).

Eli established a small family business – Winzeler's Sunshine Eggs – which prospered in spite of the Great Depression. He purchased eggs and butter at wholesale markets in Wisconsin; back at home, the family candled, graded, and repackaged eggs which were then sold to local stores and restaurants. Often, they had hired help working along with them in the basement.

Eli loved to study God's Word, aided by Bible commentaries. In August 1936, he was selected resident minister – along with Robert Haas – when the congregation was meeting in a rented building on the west side.



Eli and Ida Winzeler



Babies Janice and Carol added additional activity to the house.

In 1937, Raymond married Pearl Troxel in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and brought his bride back to Chicago; they lived with his family. Babies Janice (1938) and Carol (1941) soon added additional activity to the house. They were born at nearby Ravenswood Hospital, which was a medical pillar of the north side at the time but demolished in 2013.

An oft-repeated account gives credit to Eli for “discovering” the Sunnyside building, just three blocks from their home on Winchester:

One day in early 1937, Eli was used in an amazing way when he was out walking about 3 blocks from home. He saw a church building located at 2122 W. Sunnyside Avenue, tried the door and found it open. Inside, a small group of people were discussing how they could make the next mortgage payment. Eli inquired if the property might be for sale. Soon, with the elders’ approval, the Chicago congregation purchased and remodeled the building.

A contract of sale was signed for \$3250 on April 14, 1937. It was necessary to remodel and decorate inside and outside. A large steeple was removed, rear stairway installed, linoleum was laid in the auditorium and basement, new pews and pulpit were purchased, and two wash rooms and a kitchen were installed at a total cost of about \$12,000. In August 1937, the first services were held in the remodeled church.

Shortly after the congregation moved into the new church building, they witnessed the baptisms of seven young converts on October 24, 1937. Three of them were Winzeler children: Raymond and Pearl, and Viola Winzeler, along with Bertha and Persida Grusy, Eunice Schladenhauffen, and Frieda Zimmerman.

Other special Winzeler events occurred in the beautiful new church: Viola married Virgil Von Tobel in 1946; Richard and James were baptized in 1941.

Eli faithfully served in the ministry for 11 years until they moved to a farm in New Haven, Indiana, in 1947. Eli and Ida often spoke with great fondness of their 14 years of living in Chicago even through the years of the Great Depression and WW2.

Granddaughter Janice later married Richard Schrenk, who had also been born in Chicago. (See Edith Schrenk vignette.) In 1961, they returned to Sunnyside for four years; their story comes later.



Loretta Buettner and Dorothy Winzeler at front door of Sunnyside



*PICNIC AT GOTTLIEB AND EMILY LEHMANN'S
Back: Marie Meyer, Esther Hay
Front: Louise Knecht, Betty Bahler*

Conclusion

It was a delightful process to meet the characters of the early church and put their story into writing. It seemed as though I was invited to pull up a chair and join in their fellowship.

This is not the end of the story; it is the beginning: babies were born, wars began, businesses closed, loved ones died – people moved to the city and people moved away. Through the ever-present winds of change, the doors of the church were always open, a welcoming haven and place of refuge for the seeking soul.

It is impossible to compile an accurate, comprehensive record of everyone who has called Chicago Church home; those that are not documented experienced a parallel path. However, a Registry has been compiled with all available information. These individual stories and a digital copy of the Registry are available in the History Section of the church website at chicagoacchurch.org

The work goes on. For 35 years, the brethren came together to worship at Sunnyside and then moved out of the city and into the suburbs to 1401 S. Wolf Road, Hillside, in 1972. My efforts to capture the story continue for a proposed Centennial History (1925 – 2025). Please contact me if you have any additions or corrections.

Cindy Eisenmann
cindyeyisenmann@gmail.com