

Thiensville's History of No Churches between 1839 and 1919

By Bob Blazich for The News Graphic, December 2017

John Henry Thien, the founder of the hamlet that would eventually bear his name, came to this area from Saxony (now part of Germany) in 1842. Had he stayed in Saxony, he probably would have become a martyr in the failed revolution of 1848.

Thien believed that organized religious groups and the feudal system of the barons and dukes were responsible for the authoritarian oppression that gripped much of Europe at the time. He and his wife left Saxony to find a place where they could enjoy liberty and freedoms in line with the American Declaration of Independence.

While the Pomeranian settlers came to the Freistadt area in search of Freedom Of Religion, Thien settled just three miles to their east searching for Freedom From Religion. Thien established a Free Thinkers Society and constructed a Liberty Pole in front of his mill to remind people of their basic rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The pole was topped off with a Phrygian cap which had been used by the Romans to identify a freed slave.

During the period leading up to the opening of St. Cecilia's Catholic Church in 1919, no churches were built or proposed in the 559 acres that became the Village of Thiensville in 1910. There were some religious services in people's homes, and many residents of Thiensville attended services in neighboring churches. There is actually a report of a baby being baptized in the name of the United States of America.

Thien went on to establish a Turnerbund, the volunteer fire department, a community acting company, donated land for a school, and established a mutual support program that became part of the Grange Movement. Thien died in 1863, but his unwillingness to support the building of a church in his community remained until long after the Village of Thiensville incorporated in 1910.

In 1919, a group of twenty two families successfully petitioned the Milwaukee Archdiocese to establish a mission church in Thiensville. Peter and Josephine Ellenbecker donated the land for the church, the church was constructed by the parishioners themselves and the first mass was held on Sunday, November 23, 1919 – 80 years after the US Government sold the core 148 acres of the Village of Thiensville to John Weston.

Grace Lutheran Church, Thiensville's second church, formed an English-speaking Lutheran congregation in 1928, and Calvary Lutheran Church, which started holding services in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary chapel, dedicated their new Thiensville church in November of 1931. St. Cecilia Catholic Church closed its doors on September 25, 2016, when it completed its merger with Mequon's St. James Parish to form Lumen Christi Catholic Church on Mequon Road.