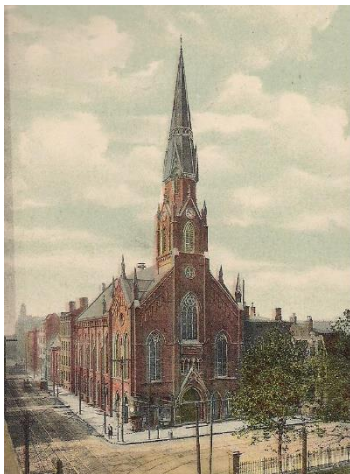


The Rev. Hugo G. Eisenlohr

Rev. Hugo Eisenlohr was the minister of St. John's from 1884 until 1931. He was born in Cincinnati on March 1, 1860, and was St. John's first minister born in the United States. Rev. Eisenlohr's ministerial training was at the Meadville Theological School, established by a Unitarian. He began his training in 1879 and graduated in 1883. When Meadville Theological School celebrated its 75th anniversary, Rev. Eisenlohr was granted an honorary Doctor of Divinity.



To understand Rev. Hugo better, it helps to know about his father, the Rev. Gustav Eisenlohr. The senior Rev. Eisenlohr supported the German revolution of 1848. His superiors at the church where he was vicar felt he had too much sympathy with the freedom movement. He had been cautioned to tone down his sermons but that wasn't in his nature. He wrote a poem in support of the freedom movement that was distributed as a flyer and publicly read a poem written by a freedom fighter. He was arrested and charged on two occasions. In the end he was fined and given the choice of imprisonment or emigration. Rev. Gustav Eisenlohr arrived in the United States about 1850. This establishes that St. John's Rev. Hugo Eisenlohr grew up in a liberal thinking home. The senior Rev. Eisenlohr was minister of German United Evangelical Church St. Paul's for 22 years. The church was located at 15th and Race Streets in Over the Rhine. St. John's congregation met there temporarily beginning in 1886 in the two years before the 12th and Elm Street church was ready. Interestingly the St. Paul's congregation formed from one of the spin-off congregations of St. John's in the 1830s.



In 1884 when Rev. Hugo Eisenlohr arrived at German Protestant St. John's Church located at 12th and Elm Streets in Over the Rhine, the congregation was \$50,000 in debt with only 200 members in good standing. Rev. Eisenlohr and the congregation worked to eliminate the debt and later the congregation was able to purchase property at 1213 Elm Street to build a parsonage.

Although an old constitution of the congregation stated that services will always be held in the German language, Rev. Eisenlohr changed this. The transition to English started with the church school. Rev. Eisenlohr realized that the children could memorize German text but they had no idea of the meaning. He brought this to the attention of the church board. Rev. Eisenlohr was given authority to do what he thought was best, and he chose to have an English language church school. In 1901, an English language

evening service began. In 1912 he began alternating German and English sermons every other Sunday. In 1918 all services and meetings were held in English except for a traditional Good Friday morning service in German. With these changes the congregation hoped to retain young people who were attracted by other German churches doing the same.

Rev. Eisenlohr became concerned that the congregation was not affiliated with any denomination and presented his concern in his annual report in 1922. The following year Rev. Eisenlohr was out of the pulpit for two months due to illness. During this time a Presbyterian and a Reformed minister delivered Sunday services. At the next annual meeting, Rev. Eisenlohr pointed out that the congregation had no place to turn in times of need. The congregation decided to affiliate with the American Unitarian Association in 1924. Rev. Eisenlohr applied for Fellowship with the Unitarian Ministry on March 22, 1924. When St. John's congregation joined the American Unitarian Association, it had 525 members in good standing. The church's name became First Protestant St. John's Church, Unitarian. In 1930 the name was changed to St. John's Unitarian Church in an amendment to the articles of the church.



Hugo Eisenlohr 1884-1931

In 1931 at the time of Rev. Eisenlohr's retirement, he was made Minister-emeritus although he continued to be active at St. John's while Rev. Krolfifer was minister. In 1934, Rev. Eisenlohr wrote a history of St. John's. He was active in the community. Rev. Eisenlohr served on the Board of the Cincinnati Public Schools from 1916-1920. He was a member of the Board of Associated Charities for 12 years and a trustee of Deaconess Hospital. According to an article written by Alfred Segal, at the time of Rev. Eisenlohr's death on September 2, 1940, Rev. Eisenlohr had officiated at 6,000 weddings, 6,500 christenings and 10,000 funerals during his time at St. John's.

Sources:

Application Form for Admission to the Fellowship of Unitarian Ministry, March 22, 1924

The Christian Register, April 24, 1924

History of St. John's Unitarian Church, by Rev. Hugo Eisenlohr, 1934

Letter written by Rev. Julius Krolfifer, October 26, 1934

Western Unitarian Conference Newsletter, November 1940

The Cincinnati Post, "Cincinnati," by Alfred Segal, approximately September 1, 1940

Biography of Hugo Gottfried Eisenlohr, by Mathilde Eisenlohr Heuck, 1945

Eisenlohr Family Histories by Roland Eisenlohr Karlsruhe and Prof. B.A. Eisenlohr, not dated

Debbie Combs, St. John's historian, June 2022