

50th year slipped by unnoticed

Preparations were being made for a gala anniversary celebration.

St. Mark's was to be 50 years old in 1975—that is, until the cornerstone of the original building was opened, unearthing a 1907 constitution of its charter congregation.

Clouded by the passage of time, it had come to be believed that St. Mark's was established in 1925, when its first church building was built at 315 Walnut.

The Rev. David Zersen, pastor of St. Mark's, received permission from the Calvary Pentecostal Church, which owns the building now to open the cornerstone and look for anything that would help him write a history of the church for its upcoming anniversary.

The cornerstone contained a German hymn book, Luther's Catechism, a copy of the 1925 building dedication ceremony, a St. Charles CHRONICLE from that year and the original constitution.

The constitution had to be translated into English from German written in Gothic script.

According to that constitution, the congregation was founded at the 10th Avenue home of the Hinz brothers, owners of the largest cut glass factory west of New York City.

Since they did not have a church of their own, the members used Bethlehem Lutheran Church, located in those days at 12 S. 7th Ave., on Sunday afternoons for worship services offered in German.

Churches in the Lutheran faith were once established according to nationality, and although there were no theological differences between St. Mark's and Bethlehem, Swedish immigrants worshipped at the latter and the Germans at St. Mark's.

For many years, St. Mark's did not have a minister of its own. Ministers in nearby towns would render services to the tiny congregation.

The Rev. Herman Harms guided the congregation from 1912 to 1919. He was paid \$50 to \$60 a year for walking from Batavia to St. Charles and back on Sunday mornings to conduct worship services. Today, the 90-year-old minister is retired and still living in Batavia.

The mistake that St. Mark's was established in 1925 resulted because that was the year the congregation built its first church. In 1952, the Lutherans purchased the church at 102 S. 5th Ave. from the United Methodists for its present home.

It is disappointing to the three remaining members of the 1925 congregation, who missed the church's golden anniversary by 17 years.