

The Berne Tri-Weekly, Adams County, IN; 23 Jul 2003.

On 23 Aug 1868 S.F. SPRUNGER, then just 19 years old, became the minister of the Berne [First Mennonite] Church. Before taking up his duties, he took 2 ½ years of training at Wadsworth Seminary in Ohio. He was in the first graduating class of 1871, and subsequently began his long ministry in Berne. He was ordained Elder 5 Mar 1874.

By 1879, the congregation had outgrown its first building and a new meeting-house was built.

After the 1879 building was in use, the old church was taken down and David Sprunger built horse sheds where the farmers could hitch their horses and buggies. Barely seven years later, the church again proved too small and an addition was attached to the building, making the church T-shaped. Two more balconies were added, as well as a much needed nursery for mothers and babies.

Church growth continued to be rapid under the strong leadership of S.F. Sprunger and in 1899; the building was further enlarged, adding seating for 255 people. It was this time that the bell was added, which still calls worshipers to the church.

Samuel initiated quite a few changes within the church and is viewed as an outstanding leader. His family was the second Mennonite family to own a reed organ. It was this organ that was most likely taken to the church for use on special occasions prior to the church having one installed. He attended the first seminary established by Mennonites in America. He led the church as it moved out of its restrictive isolation into a more vibrant form of faith expression. He supported the new developing General Conference Mennonite Church and represented the congregation at early meetings. Support of mission endeavors was initiated, along with programs that enhanced the life of the local congregation such as Christian education]

Health problems brought on the resignation of S.F. Sprunger in 1903. He had been the pastor and leader since 1871. Under his pastorate, the Sunday School had become a strong arm of the church; the choral society was started and presented its first oratorio, Hayden's Creation, in 1890; the Women's Missionary Society was organized at his suggestion in 1887; the church records began to be kept and in the 1890s, year books were printed.

He served on the Foreign Mission Board of the GC Mennonite Church from 1884 - 1887 and again from 1896 - 1917; on the Publication Board from 1884 - 1893, and the Home Mission Board for many years. He edited the German Sunday school quarterly from 1889 - 1920 and the Bundesbote Kalender from 1886 - 1922.

Sprunger served the Berne church as active pastor from 1871 - 1903, from 1911 - 1913, and as supply pastor 1914 - 1919. He preached his last sermon on Sept. 14, 1919.

Sprunger was not in good health the last 20 years of his life. He had an eye operation in 1902, and in 1903 he suffered from a fractured hip when he fell while chasing some chickens. He never fully recovered and had to use a cane. He died of pneumonia on November 16, 1923.

Samuel and Mrs. Sprunger had ten children.

(See also GC Mennonite Pioneers, 1973)