

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: Churchville in Addison Township, Illinois

Since the middle of the 19th century, a stretch of road between Elmhurst and Bensenville has been known as Churchville due to several religious buildings that have long occupied the area. Though presently located in unincorporated Addison Township, the land's history frequently overlaps with that of neighboring Elmhurst. For the majority of the township's history, the landmarks of Churchville have been Zion Lutheran Church, Immanuel Reformed Church, and the Churchville One Room Schoolhouse.

Originally founded in 1838 by German settlers, **Zion Lutheran Church** was built at present-day 865 S. Church Road in 1862 on land acquired from Louis Schmidt. It remains there as of 2021. Originally known as the German United Lutheran Reformed Church of Addison, there was a split between Lutheran and Reformed denominations in 1848 which resulted in the creation of St. John's Church in Bensenville. The Lutheran church became known as Zion in 1895. The large Zion parish eventually fractured into several congregations—Zion is the progenitor of Immanuel Lutheran in Elmhurst, St. Paul Lutheran in Addison, St. Luke's in Itasca, Trinity Lutheran in York Center, and Immanuel Lutheran in Proviso.



Zion Lutheran Church on Church Road, built 1862. EHM collection, M84.34.43.

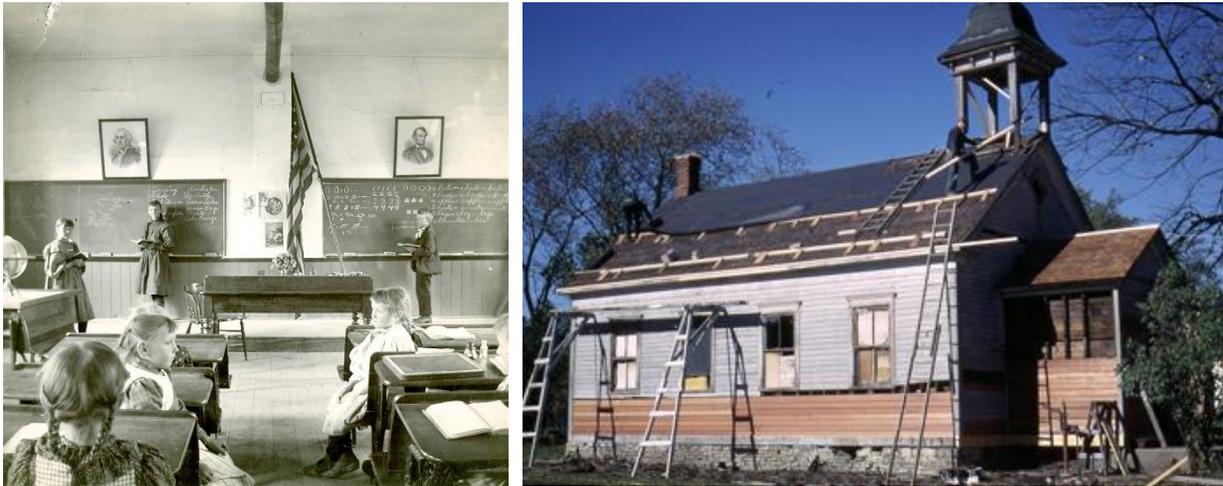
Immanuel Reformed Church was built in 1859, some years after the congregation split from Zion Lutheran Church. Churchville Cemetery was founded in conjunction with the church that same year. The original wood frame Immanuel Reformed Church building burned down circa 1924 and a new building was constructed on the same site in 1925. Immanuel Church moved to a new building on the east side of the street in 1967 at present-day 1009 S. Church Road, and St. Demetrios Orthodox Church of DuPage County moved into the 1925 structure. St. Demetrios Church burned down in February 1970 and was rebuilt in 1977-79 at 839 N. Church Road in Elmhurst.



Looking north towards Churchville from Grand Avenue, circa 1900. Immanuel Church is at left on the west side of the road, and Zion Church is at right. M90.27.3.

Due to dwindling attendance, Immanuel United Church of Christ merged with St. John's UCC (whose land was overtaken by O'Hare Airport) and Peace Church in Bensenville to form Faith Community UCC in 2009, located at 192 S. Center Street. Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church moved into the old Immanuel UCC building in 2010.

The Churchville Schoolhouse was built circa 1850. It was consistently used as a School District 3 classroom through 1930, with one teacher instructing eight grades of students. The schoolhouse was closed to classes after a new brick Churchville School opened on the same street south of Grand Avenue. District 3 continued to use the space for board meetings and allowed civic and church organizations to use the space for gatherings. Immanuel Church used the building for Sunday school classes beginning in 1954. The schoolhouse was also used as an overflow classroom to relieve overcrowding at Tioga Elementary School that same year.



Left: Class at the Churchville Schoolhouse, circa 1895. M90.27.4. Right: Repair work undertaken by the Churchville Historical Society, circa 1968, M2011.7.40.

Through the 1950s and 60s, a litigation battle erupted between the school district and the Fischer family when District 3 attempted to sell the property. The August Fischer family originally donated the property specifically for a schoolhouse in the late 1840s, and the issue concluded with District 3 relinquishing title of the property back to Fischer family ownership in 1965.

By the late 1960s, the schoolhouse had fallen into disrepair. A group of students and local residents banded together to make repairs to the building and form the Churchville Historical Society, which leased the property from the Fischer family. The society maintained the schoolhouse and held regular meetings to manage the property well into the 1970s.

In 1988, Elmhurst Community Unit School District 205 purchased the schoolhouse from the Fischer family and used the space for historical programming. The program ended in 1997 due to the deteriorating condition of the building and lack of funding, and the schoolhouse was acquired by the City of Elmhurst in 2001. In 2007, the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. After much repair and restoration by the City of Elmhurst in cooperation with the Village of Bensenville and support from the Elmhurst Heritage Foundation, the schoolhouse reopened as an Elmhurst History Museum programming space for living history programs in 2010.

By Daniel Lund, Elmhurst History Museum Staff, Updated October 2021