

Pastor Frederick Picker's
St. Louis Churches and Cemeteries

By Michael McDermott



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Pastor Frederick Picker

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By Michael McDermott

Among the many cemeteries opened and closed in this city, three of the more interesting were opened by Pastor Frederick Picker and the members of his two congregations. Prior to beginning a discussion of the cemeteries, it would be enlightening to learn a little about the man himself, his ministry, and his churches. Pastor Frederick Picker was born in Germany about 1802, according to the 1850 U.S. census. According to an anniversary booklet published in 1904 by the German Evangelical Church of the Holy Ghost, in 1843 he was called from Apple Creek, in southeast Missouri, to be pastor of their church. At that time, the congregation was worshipping in a church building at the corner of Seventh and Clark.

Pastor Picker was a charismatic and hard working minister of the Lord, as evidenced by the growth of Holy Ghost Church during the twelve years of his Pastorate (1843 to 1855). People traveled twenty to thirty miles over



Pastor Picker
From Holy Ghost 1904
Anniversary Booklet

rough roads to be married by him or to have their children baptized. He is credited with 2,667 marriages and 5,007 baptisms during his time at Holy Ghost. The same 1850 census records that Pastor Picker had a wife and four children and a personal estate worth \$10,000. In 1856 Pastor Picker was assigned an assistant pastor for Holy Ghost, Rev. Dr. Hugo Krebs. Some friction developed, which resulted in Pastor Picker leaving Holy Ghost with seventy families and establishing the Independent Evangelical Protestant Congregation. Dr. Krebs then became the pastor of Holy Ghost.

Pastor Picker received no salary from his new congregation but did receive payment to cover the lodgings of his family and him. The anniversary book describes Pastor Picker as a "people's person," of great willpower and tremendous energy. He was active as a leader in the Turnverein (gymnastic) movement and also preached at a church in Marine, Illinois, in addition to his other duties. In July 1859 Pastor Picker's exhaustive duties caused him to become ill and unable to leave his residence. To rest and recuperate, he returned to southeast Missouri where he died shortly after.

Reverend Hugo Krebs

The Rev. Dr. Hugo Krebs deserves his own place in this chronicle. According to the 1860

census, he was thirty-five years old when he assumed the pastorate of the Holy Ghost Church. It can be assumed, without casting aspersions on either man, that his appointment to assist the popular older man was the root, if not the whole cause, of the friction between them.

Pastor Krebs, according to the 1860 census, resided with

his wife, Matilda, his father, Dedrich W. Krebs, Notary, his mother, Henrietta, and a servant girl, Fredericka Matzdorff. All were Prussian born. Pastor Krebs's estate was valued at \$2000. As it developed, Pastor Krebs was also a hard working minister to the congregation. The same anniversary booklet gives him credit for 1,466 marriages and 4,244 baptisms in his ten years as pastor.

In addition, Pastor Krebs may have been instrumental in recruiting German Home Guards for the defense of the St. Louis Arsenal at the

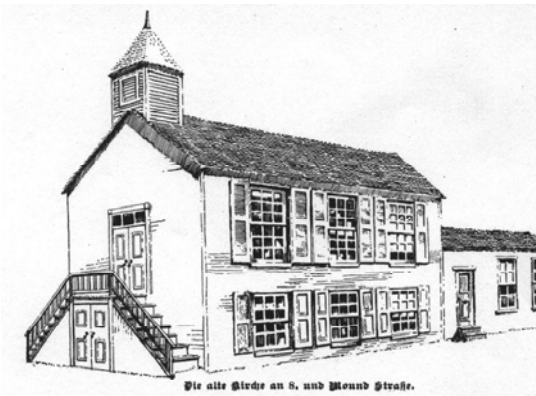


PASTOR DR. HUGO KREBS.

From Holy Ghost 1904
Anniversary Booklet

start of the Civil War. In Professor Rowan's book, *Germans for a Free Missouri*, a 9 May 1861 article in the *Anzeiger des Westens* states that about 1,300 men marched to the Arsenal to be sworn into Federal service. In the center of this procession marched the "white-haired flagbearer D. Krebs, the father of the pastor who marched beside him shoulder to shoulder." The German idiom makes it unclear whether Pastor Krebs was in the parade, or whether the reference was to Capt. Tony Niederweiser, but Pastor Krebs surely had something to do with the recruiting.

Pastor Krebs also gave an impassioned sermon on 19 April 1865 on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. This sermon was translated



Old Church
Independent Evangelical Protestant Anniversary Booklet
1906

into English by "A Lady Hearer" and published in booklet form. It was also published in the original German in the above mentioned anniversary booklet of the Holy Ghost Church and ended with President Lincoln and God looking down from on high and stating "Peace to All."

Pastor Krebs finished his ministry by making the ultimate sacrifice. During the cholera epidemic of 1866, he determined that his parishioners should receive Christian burials and conducted as many as thirty-four a day. Given the highly contagious nature of the disease, it was a matter of time before Pastor Krebs himself came down with cholera and died the same day. He was buried in the cemetery of the Holy Ghost Church.

The German Evangelical Church of the Holy Ghost

The German Evangelical Church of the Holy Ghost, served by both pastors, as well as others, has an interesting history. Their first meetings, around 1834, were in a school room next to the First Presbyterian Church at Fourth and Washington Avenues. From there, they were able to purchase property at Seventh and Clark, where they built their own church. A succession of pastors and trustees built the church up to a fine congregation. After several moves, including a short period of worshipping in the B'Nai El Temple at Spring and Flad, they finally moved to their present church at South Kingshighway and Mardel. There, in 1928, Pastor Theodore C. Braun told the *Globe-Democrat* that the church was probably older than the 1834 date, but that was as far back as their records went. This would make Holy Ghost the oldest German place of worship in St. Louis. (German Catholics worshipped at the Old Cathedral with the French and Irish.)

The 1842 deed for the church property at Seventh and Clark contains a statement of the beliefs of the congregation, namely that "the congregation acknowledges as the only basis of their Christian faith the holy bible of the old and new testament [*sic*] and believes in the explanation of the same as laid down in the symbolical book of the Evangelical Lutheran and the reformed Evangelical Church in so far as they correspond," and they also state that anyone who acts as pastor or preacher in their church will believe the same and preach accordingly. This is not usually seen in a deed, but it testifies that the folks were quite serious about their faith.

Prominent in this deed and others were the names of Jacob Westerman and William Schrader, who were instrumental in organizing and developing three congregations, as well as several cemeteries in the 1840s and later. In 1843 there had been some differences in religious opinion, and Provisional Pastor Georg Wendelin Wall separated from Holy Ghost and formed the German Evangelical Congregation of St. Louis, Mo., which later divided into a North Division and a South Division. These congregations were St. Peter's and St. Marcus,

respectively. These two churches founded cemeteries which are still in use.

It should also be mentioned that when Frederick (Franz) Picker assumed the pastorate of the Holy Ghost Church in 1843, a new constitution had been adopted and approved by the congregation which deprived the pastor of the right to attend or vote at the meetings of the board and congregation (and possibly had something to do with the wording of the above deed). This may have been a blessing in disguise, as it apparently left Pastor Picker free to shepherd his flock, as attested by the number of weddings and baptisms, as well as the people who came great distances to be served by him.

Happily, both the Church of the Holy Ghost and the Independent Evangelical Protestant Congregation are still functioning as places of worship and are associated with the United Churches of Christ. Holy Ghost joined the Missouri Valley Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Churches, (now the U.C.C.), and the Independent Evangelical Protestant Congregation joined the Congregational Christian denomination. It later became affiliated with U.C.C. and was renamed Christ the King Church.

Holy Ghost's first church, as mentioned, was at 7th and Clark, while Pastor Picker's Independent Church opened at 8th and Mound. Both churches moved several times before reaching their present locations at 4916 Mardel and 11370 Old Halls Ferry, respectively.

One might wonder what the history of two churches has to do with genealogy. The answer is that all of the above people have relatives. Readers may find some information on their ancestors in the above narrative. Also, if an ancestor was a member of any of these churches, this information may offer clues as to where a person was at a particular time, what the person believed in, where they might be buried, and so forth. In addition, this is a necessary prelude to the study of the cemeteries founded by Pastor Picker, the present location of any of the remains, and their condition.

The Picker Cemeteries

Before embarking on a discussion of the Picker cemeteries, a chronology of the three cemeteries should be made. The first cemetery was located on twenty acres bounded by Compton Ave., Louisiana Ave., Wyoming, and Arsenal Streets in south St. Louis. The second cemetery was generally on the south side of Gravois near River Des Peres, and the third was across the street on the north side of Gravois. After the first cemetery was well established, the second was opened and was called the "New" Picker Cemetery, the first one having been the "Old." When the third cemetery was opened, the second became the "Old" and the third became the "New." Thus we have two "Olds" and two "News" but only three cemeteries. This has caused a great deal of confusion over the years.

To avoid any misunderstandings, for the balance of this history, we will refer to the first cemetery by its proper name, which was the Evangelical Protestant Cemetery Association of the Church of the Holy Ghost, or Holy Ghost Cemetery. The other two will be called as before, the Old Picker and the New Picker Cemeteries.

Fortunately, Pastor Picker's Independent Evangelical Protestant Church also published a booklet marking their Golden Jubilee, in 1906. Many of the facts buttress information learned from the Holy Ghost Church booklet but there are also many other pertinent facts concerning the two cemeteries.

As there were no German churches in St. Louis, so also there were no German cemeteries.

As there were no German churches in St. Louis, so also there were no German cemeteries. The decision to buy ground for a churchyard in the vicinity of Gravois and Compton was made by the Holy Ghost congregation and nine and 70/100th acres were purchased. At that time, this intersection was semi-rural and was adjoined by common fields which may have been cultivated. The initial purchase was made on 2 November 1846 and the first burial was seven days later. Since more ground was available, on 25 April

1853, the lot was expanded to twenty acres bounded by the streets noted above.

The spectre of cholera affected many of the events of the city during the period from 1849 to 1866 and this may have led to the expansion of the cemetery. In addition, the middle of the nineteenth century was a time when cemeteries were beginning to be laid out as gardens and as peaceful places to meditate and visit deceased loved ones, as opposed to the utilitarian lines of congested stones which marked earlier graveyards and later ones. Old maps of the Holy Ghost cemetery show lanes crossing each other and two circular drives in the center of the plot. Still, in Camille Dry's *Pictorial St. Louis*, which contains drawings from an aerial perspective, the cemetery is shown with only a few walkways. However, this was in 1875, and by 1884, there had been 24,683 burials.

Rev. Picker founded the Holy Ghost cemetery and undoubtedly conducted a number of burials during the cholera epidemics of 1849 and 1854 while he was pastor of Holy Ghost. This caused the grounds to be commonly called Picker's Cemetery. Again, more confusion as some death certificates called the grounds Picker's Cemetery and some Holy Ghost Cemetery.

A notable burial in Holy Ghost cemetery on 1 June 1861 was that of Captain Constantine Blandowski, the first Union fatality west of the Mississippi River during the Civil War. Captain Blandowski was escorted by a parade from downtown to the Holy Ghost cemetery, where he was buried with a rifle salute and full military honors, including a funeral oration by Dedrich Krebs, Pastor Krebs's father.

No photographs are known to exist of Holy Ghost cemetery during its best years, but *St. Louis Republican* newspaper photographs from 1910 show the front gate and the poor condition of the grounds in general.

In a similar manner, it is difficult to date the closing of the cemetery prior to 1917. Some records indicate that the City Assembly had forbidden further burials in 1893, but extant burial records show large numbers of burials in 1898 and more in 1905.

What can be concluded with certainty is that by the turn of the twentieth century the city had grown up around the grounds, and by 1910 the cemetery was in a dilapidated condition. In April 1902, the Tenth Ward Improvement Association petitioned the mayor and the city to order discontinuance of burials. By this time some remains had been removed, in particular, Adam Brucker, buried 17 August 1863, was removed to Friedens Cemetery in 1909. Also, while the cemetery was being moved in 1916, a Judge Leo Rassieur was quoted in the *St. Louis Republican* as pointing out the location where his grandfather had been buried in 1884 and stating that the remains had been moved twelve years prior.

Cholera

An acute intestinal ailment, cholera is caused by drinking water that has been contaminated, often with fecal waste, or eating food that contains the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. Primarily a disease of the very young, its primary symptom is acute diarrhea, which leads to dehydration. Vomiting can sometimes occur as well. Easily treated today with rehydrating fluids and antibiotics, cholera has hit in widespread epidemics throughout history.

In addition to the two above stated reasons for wanting Holy Ghost Cemetery removed, there was the fear of contamination of public water supplies by the cholera-infected bodies in the cemetery. Cholera is so virulent that even today cemeteries have prohibitions against digging in areas where cholera victims are known to be buried.

Whatever the dates, it is confirmed that in 1916 the property was still owned by the Holy Ghost congregation, evidenced by a Building Permit dated 19 October 1916 in their name, permitting the moving of a frame shed on City Block 1467. Another Building Permit dated 10 April 1922 permits construction of a "3 Story 1st Class School." In the interim, the property had been sold to Richard C. Spackler for subdivision purposes in January 1917.

The removal of the remains in Holy Ghost cemetery is an interesting story in itself. Some of the bodies had been removed while the

cemetery was deteriorating, as noted above. Others were moved en masse in 1916 and possibly earlier. Newspaper accounts describe the digging up and removal of bones in soap boxes. There were also allegations of removal of personal property and disrespect for the dead. The reporter for the *Republican* did not get the other side of the story by talking to the workers. If this had been done, the anonymous reporter may have been told, as was a later reporter during the removal of St. Paul's Cemetery from Gravois and Holly Hills, that the wood boxes were made particularly for removing bodies which were originally buried in wood coffins and likely to have decomposed to bones.

The workmen were paid on the basis of the numbers of bodies removed, in piecework fashion, so it is apparent that a large number of remains were removed. Still, it is unlikely that



*Teddy Roosevelt
from 1904 Holy Ghost booklet*

*with best wishes on the 70th anniversary
of the Evangelical Protestant Church of St. Louis
from
Theodore Roosevelt
Nov 24 1903*

all were removed, and there are probably some left under the grounds of Theodore Roosevelt High School, as well as the block of residences fronting on Arsenal Street and Hartford Street between Compton and Louisiana. This writer grew up within four blocks of these premises in the 1940s and heard many conflicting tales from older residents about the evacuation of the grounds. Some even said the premises were haunted, but my mother, my wife, and I all attended this school and had no supernatural experiences.

It is worth mentioning here that anyone who is familiar with the Theodore Roosevelt High School will agree that it is certainly a "1st Class School." The architecture and landscaping have been a landmark in South St. Louis since the school was opened, and the institution is still educating its students capably. In what is probably a coincidence, the 1904 anniversary booklet published by Holy Ghost Church contained a note of congratulations from the president of the United States, along with his photo. And, of course, our president in 1904 was Theodore Roosevelt.

Shortly after Pastor Picker founded his new Independent Evangelical Protestant Congregation, it was decided that they needed their own cemetery. As their 1906 anniversary booklet states, "The churchyard is a serious and holy place for the congregation, 'You are earth and shall to earth return,' it calls to you. A man's life is like grass and for a while it blossoms in the field and then is no more."

Thus the second cemetery founded by Pastor Picker was the New Picker cemetery (later the Old) on the south side of Gravois Road near River Des Peres. Opened on 25 April 1856, this



Die Abbildung vom Gräbhof der Unabhängigen Evangelischen Protestantischen Gemeinde.

New Picker Monuments, from Independent Evangelical Protestant Congregation Booklet, 1906

was a twelve and a half acre plot. The ground was owned by Pastor Picker and was sold to the congregation by him for the price of \$3125.

The next cemetery opened by the congregation, in 1881 after Pastor Picker's death, consisted of eighteen acres on the north side of Gravois, opposite the above plot, bought for \$11,000 from a Mr. Hinteresche, and finally in

1901, 28 more acres adjoining the Hinteresche plot were purchased from a Mr. Kleinschmidt for \$12,500. The anniversary booklet proudly states that “we now possess 58 acres.” Notwithstanding the faulty math, these last two plots comprise the New Picker Cemetery.

The 1906 anniversary booklet proclaims, “The cemetery is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful, practical and suitable, sectioned with drainage and beautiful shaded driveways to be seen, and soon we expect the last piece of ground to be suitably equipped with gravel paths, with shade trees planted and divided into sections, offered as a selection for purchase.”

Another advantage at this later date was stated as, “Also our cemetery, once so far, ‘outside the door of the city,’ now lies near and can be reached by electric railway from all parts of the city easily and comfortably. In a joyful manner we can truly say: ‘It is a beautiful People’s Cemetery.’”

There is no question that this description fit both cemeteries, Old and New Picker’s, evidenced by photos in the 1906 anniversary booklet, and they remain so today. But in the interim, the Independent Congregation sold the two cemeteries and they went through several owners. The two plots became dilapidated, but not to the extent that no one visited and that there were no burials. By 1993 the plots had deteriorated to the extent that some people had to cut paths through the tall grass to reach the graves of their loved ones.

In fact, many people still had deeds for prepaid plots and perpetual care. They expected the services for which they had paid, but the owner at that time had no records. In 1986 it became necessary for the State Attorney General’s office to file suit against three prior owners, accusing them of depleting the perpetual care fund. The case was settled in 1988, but the two cemeteries were still uncared for. It finally became necessary for the City of St. Louis to assume ownership and the Forestry Division now keeps the grounds in decent order. Some tombstones are missing and some have been vandalized, but overall these cemeteries, now called Gatewood Gardens, have resumed their dignity.

No date could be found for Independent Evangelical Protestant Congregation’s sale of the property, but the history of these plots during the twentieth century is beyond the scope of this article.



Gatewood Gardens (New Picker)
Photo by Michael McDermott, 2002

A few loose ends to be attended to include the fact that some old maps refer to Holy Ghost cemetery as “Picker’s or Picot” cemetery. The only person of this name who could be found was a Louis G. Picot, who came to St. Louis in 1841 from his native Richmond, Va. He

engaged in the practice of law and became the top Land Claim and Deed attorney in St. Louis. He may have had something to do with the purchase of the Holy Ghost plots, but his name doesn’t show up anywhere on the deeds. Interesting accounts of his life can be found in Hyde and Conard’s *An Encyclopedia of St. Louis* and in NiNi Harris’s *A History of Carondelet*.

Epilogue

We would appreciate any information from readers concerning these cemeteries. As was mentioned in Ann Fleming's article in the Winter 2001 issue of the *Quarterly*, our cemetery project is an ongoing work involving many volunteers and much hard work. We expect to be working on this a long time and appreciate any help. We are also in a position to help genealogists during the process of correlating death records and cemetery records.

And Thanks. . .

My sincere thanks to Val Detjen, Archivist at Eden Theological Seminary of the United Churches of Christ, for the tremendous help and information she has given me. Also of great help were Sandy Bender, Archivist at the St. Louis City Recorder of Deeds Office, Clareece Hughes, of the St. Louis City Building Inspector's Office, and Sharon Huffman, Archivist of the St. Louis Board of Education. The staff at the Missouri Historical Society was also very helpful.

About the Author

Michael McDermott is a retired legal investigator and former St. Louis City police officer. He has written articles for professional investigative journals, as well as for the Fall 2001 *Quarterly*. He is a volunteer for the StLGS, currently working on the cemetery research project. The German translations were done by him, and he is solely responsible for their accuracy.

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