

WELS Historical Institute

Journal

Volume 30, Number 1

Spring 2012



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Cover picture
St. Louis Class of 1879 with August Pieper
Courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

From the Editor

In 1862 Pastor John Bading, the president of the Wisconsin Synod, noted the shortage of pastors in the synod and urged the founding of a seminary. He declared, "We must in our country, in our synod, establish a source from which workers will flow." The very next year the synod founded a seminary in Watertown, Wisconsin. Looking forward to the 150th anniversary of the founding of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary we offer in this issue an article by Dr. Joel Pless of Wisconsin Lutheran College entitled, "A Big Sister Helping Out a Little Sister: The St. Louis Years of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1870-1878." Dr. Pless details an important time in the history of our synod when our future pastors were trained in St. Louis by C.F.W. Walther and the capable faculty of Concordia Seminary. Those who received their seminary training in St. Louis during these years include John Schaller, J.P. Koehler, and August Pieper. These three each served as professors and, in turn, president of our Wisconsin Synod's seminary and contributed much to our synod's theological heritage. We thank Dr. Pless for his significant contribution to our understanding of this era.

The purpose of the WELS Historical Institute Journal is to preserve the history of WELS and Lutheranism in America and to promote an understanding of that history. To fulfill that purpose we solicit scholarly articles, historical vignettes, and book reviews for publication.

John M. Brenner

A BIG SISTER HELPING OUT A LITTLE SISTER

The St. Louis Years of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1870–1878

Joel Loren Pless

Introduction

As Lutherans immigrated to the New World and began organizing into synods—often consciously or unconsciously—certain institutions were seen as benchmarks for ecclesiastical permanency. Among these were the publication of a church periodical, the creation of a publishing house, and perhaps most importantly, the establishment of a theological seminary for training pastors.

When the Wisconsin Synod was founded in May 1850, it had little money, no church periodical, no publishing house and no worker training system. It had only a handful of pastors and congregations. It relied on various mission societies in the German lands to supply pastors to congregations that sought its affiliation. After a decade of existence, it became obvious that in order for the synod to survive and grow, it needed a local supply of pastors. In his 1862 convention report, synod president Rev. John Bading declared, “We must educate our young under our own eyes!” A year later, the synod was able to establish a miniscule seminary in Watertown, Wisconsin.¹

A Humble and Inauspicious Beginning

The beginning of what is now Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was anything but promising. The nascent seminary began with one professor and two students. One of these two was soon dismissed for disciplinary reasons, but the other, A. Siegler, went on to graduate and served the synod for many years.² The seminary began in September 1863 in a still extant building, the Gardner House, which at the time was the residence of the school’s only professor, Rev. Edward F. Moldehnke.³ Two years later, the seminary moved to the top floor of Northwestern University’s original building, the “Coffee Mill” (*Kaffeemühle*). Northwestern was the second synodical school of the Wisconsin Synod, founded in 1865.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s Watertown years were years of constant struggle. The synod itself was founded with few financial resources and it relied upon the support of “Eastern Lutheranism” and mission societies in Germany to maintain just a basic subsistence. The synodical reports during the mid-1860s reveal a persistent shortage of funds and pleas for support to maintain the seminary. Despite the challenges, a couple competent men—

already saddled with numerous other responsibilities—managed to provide a quality seminary education to young men who felt the summons of the Lutheran ministry. Professor Moldehnke used his own library as the seminary library and taught his few students a remarkable curriculum. Beside the standard theological courses like dogmatics and church history, Moldehnke followed a rigorous schedule and taught Latin, German, Greek, English, mathematics, geography and Hebrew.⁴

Not only did financial problems affect the seminary’s Watertown years, but there were also personality conflicts. Professor Moldehnke was unquestionably a gifted man, but he was also a temperamental man who held several synodical positions simultaneously. Besides being director and the only professor of the seminary, he also functioned part of the year as the *Reiseprediger*, the synod’s traveling missionary. During the 1865–1866 school year, there appeared to be a breakdown of discipline on the third floor of the “Coffee Mill.” In response, the seminary board called Pastor Adolf Hoenecke to serve as Inspector—what is today called the dean of students—as well as to serve as the second theological professor. These actions immediately resulted in Moldehnke’s resignation. Moldehnke believed that Hoenecke’s call suggested criticism of his own ministry and that the seminary in its infancy could not afford and did not need a second professor.⁵ He eventually returned to Germany where he served as a pastor in East Prussia for some years. After struggling against the demands of the Prussian Union, he returned to America and eventually became president of the New York Ministerium and the General Council. Moldehnke died in 1904.⁶

After Moldehnke’s departure, Adolf Hoenecke began a legendary teaching career with hardly any students initially. The Wisconsin Synod’s centennial history describes these years of its seminary’s history as a period of “almost constant crisis.”⁷ Much of this was caused by a penury of funds. Only four students were enrolled when Hoenecke began his seminary teaching career in 1866. It is an irony of history that after the young Wisconsin Synod established a theological seminary, the synod had a most difficult time in getting its congregations to provide regular financial support for it and its families to encourage their sons to pursue the pastoral ministry.

Addressing Identity Problems

There were also deeper issues. The Wisconsin Synod was trying to find its theological identity in the 1860s. After being founded in 1850 in the spirit of a middling Lutheranism, halfway between the “Eastern Lutheranism” of the General Synod and the “Old Lutheranism” of the Buffalo and the Missouri Synods, men began to join the synod who sought to be identified as subscribing without qualification to the Lutheran Confessions. These men included Hoenecke, Philip Koehler and John Bading. They began moving the synod toward the doctrinal position of Old Lutheranism.

The mid-nineteenth century Lutheranism in and around Watertown, Wisconsin, was a microcosm of what was happening throughout much of Midwestern Lutheranism. Congregations of numerous Lutheran synods in the area—including Buffalo, Missouri, and Wisconsin—were all competing for members and often showed an element of hostility toward each other.

There also existed an element of tension on the campus of the newly-founded Northwestern University. The president of the institution, Prof. Adam Martin—although a vigorous proponent of the school—subscribed more to the “Eastern Lutheranism” stance, while the third floor seminary professor, Hoenecke, sought to heighten the synod’s confessional consciousness. Not surprisingly, the synod’s centennial history reports: “But as the Synod steadily tended to become more confessional and more purely Lutheran in practice, Martin found the atmosphere uncongenial and resigned his post in protest.”⁸ The proverbial last straw for President Martin and several others was the difficult decision by the synod in convention to sever fraternal ties with the very mission societies in Germany that had mothered Wisconsin from its founding.

The decade of the 1860s was the decade in which much of Midwestern Lutheranism attempted to find its confessional moorings. Early in this decade Wisconsin began to move toward the right of its middling position, the position of its original founder, Rev. Johannes Muehlhaeuser. This was the direct result of the leadership of men like Bading and Hoenecke and it produced much consternation across the Atlantic with the unionistic mission societies that still financially supported Wisconsin and regularly sent pastors to the synod. In exchange for financial support and candidates, these mission societies—supportive more or less to the aims of the Prussian Union—expected Wisconsin Synod congregations to cheerfully serve both Lutheran and Reformed members at the same time. Wisconsin by the later 1860s considered this to be doctrinally and practically untenable. The 1868 synod convention severed ties with the German mission societies, ending any further hope of Wisconsin receiving funds or pastors from Germany.

New Synodical Friends Bring Mutual Opportunities

The Wisconsin Synod immediately sought to establish closer ties with other like-minded Lutherans, partly in the hope that it could share the cost of training future church workers, in view of Wisconsin’s young and struggling Northwestern University in Watertown. The 1868 convention passed this resolution directed at the Northern Conference of the Missouri Synod:

1. As far as the committee knows, there is no conflict in doctrine, but it is confined to disputes over practical matters, encroaching on individual members of both synods, and placing articles in the public press, which often contain the tone of hatefulness and derision rather than of sincere sorrow over such improper actions, and loving admonition. The committee regrets this discord wholeheartedly.

2. The synod authorize the Hon. president to take proper steps for the restoration of peace, so that a mutual recognition of both as Lutheran synods and a brotherly relationship between the members of both synods in the spirit of truth on the basis of pure doctrine may result.⁹

It was from this desire for the Wisconsin Synod to have a “brotherly relationship” with the Missouri Synod that Wisconsin’s theological seminary would experience a decade of existence down in St. Louis.



C. F. W. Walther
Eighty Eventful Years
© Concordia Publishing
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Fraternal relations developed quickly between Missouri and Wisconsin. Representatives of the two synods met at St. John, Milwaukee, where John Bading served, for two days, October 21–22, 1868. Among the representatives present were C. F. W. Walther and Ferdinand Sievers of the Missouri Synod and Bading and Hoenecke of the Wisconsin Synod. At this meeting it was discovered that the two synods were in complete agreement in doctrine and practice. According to John P. Koehler’s *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Walther declared to the Wisconsin men present: “Brethren, if we had known all this before we might have been united ten years ago already.”¹⁰ The two synods at their respective conventions the following summer formally declared themselves in fellowship.

While the two synods recognized each other as orthodox Lutheran church bodies, the October 1868 Milwaukee agreement did not *specifically* delineate a plan for cooperation between the synodical school systems of Missouri and Wisconsin. Another meeting in Milwaukee took place in May 1869, where synodical representatives came up with a tentative mutual agreement to share each other’s educational institutions. While there are apparently no records extant indicating where this meeting took place, two likely possibilities are either St. John again, located at the time on Prairie and Fourth Streets, or the Missouri Synod’s “Old” Trinity, located then on Fourth and Wells Streets.¹¹ Trinity was Missouri’s first congregation within the city limits of Milwaukee.

The decisions made at this meeting, May 19, 1869, created “the St. Louis years of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.” At the Wisconsin Synod’s annual convention that year, which began a matter of days after the momentous Milwaukee meeting, the convention delegates heard this report of the May 19 agreement, “for joint work in the educational institutions of both sides.”¹² This report spells out the exact stipulations of the joint Missouri-Wisconsin agreement:

Since it is to be awaited that the adopted reconciliation of representatives of both synods formulated in October of last year for the purpose of a joint recognition that both synods are truly believing Lutheran church bodies, be ratified by both sides, it therefore has made the further thought appropriate that it is most highly desirable to achieve a reconciliation for joint work in the educational institutions of both sides.

The board of trustees, which considered this situation more closely and recognized the importance of this matter, appointed the undersigned members of the synod who together with the undersigned members of the Missouri Synod, each acting as representatives of their synods, were to draft a basis for working together.

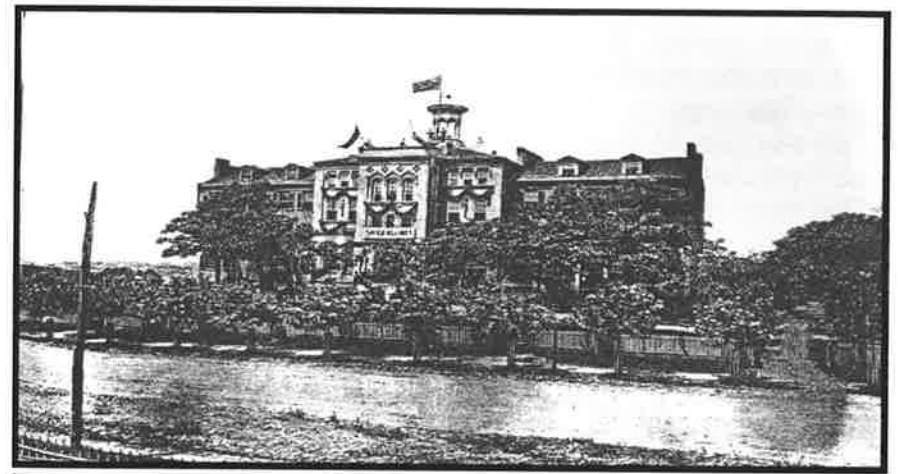
As a result we permit ourselves to inform the Hon. synod of the result of the discussion of this matter in Milwaukee on May 19 of this year and to refer the same for further discussion and final disposition:

- I. The Synod of Missouri would make use of the institution of the Synod of Wisconsin in Watertown, Wis. which consists of an English academy, a college and a German *Gymnasium*, in the following manner:
 - a) it would make use of the institution by sending students, who would be accepted under the same conditions as the students from the Synod from Wisconsin.
 - b) it would provide the institution with a professor who would be elected and salaried by it. The Synod of Wisconsin holds the right of ratification. Concerning ratification or non-ratification only doctrine, lifestyle and capabilities alone are to be considered.
 - c) it supports this institution with gifts.
- II. The Synod of Wisconsin would make use of the pastor seminary of the Synod of Missouri in St. Louis, Mo., in the following manner:
 - a) its students, who desire to be educated for the preaching ministry, would receive their education in the mentioned institution.
 - b) its students, in respect to their maintenance costs, would be assessed the same as the students of the Synod of Missouri.
 - c) it will provide the maintenance costs for its students.
 - d) it will supply a theological professor for this institution, who will be elected and salaried by it. The Synod of Missouri holds the right of ratification. Concerning the ratification or non-ratification only doctrine, lifestyle and capabilities are to be considered. The selected professor remains a member of his synod and takes part *ex officio* in conventions and conferences.

- e) It supports this institution with its gifts.
- III. Concerning the joint administration of each of the institutions, both synods agree to the following:
 - a) each of the two synods is responsible for the administration, upkeep and development of its respective institution.
 - b) to elect their presidents for the institutions as administrators who the right for suspensions is given, but who are obligated after ordering a suspension to inform the other synod, namely the president, about it, so that a final determination can be made according to the circumstances, either to lift the suspension, to let it stand, or result in a removal.
 - c) the control of the students of one synod in the institution of the other synod is guided by the regulations of the respective institution.

Milwaukee, Wis. May 19, 1869
Johannes Bading, Adolf Hoenecke, Phil. Koehler,
Friedrich Lochner, John P. Beyer.¹³

The question that is most often asked historically about this “working together” agreement between Missouri and Wisconsin is this: Did Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary actually *merge* into Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and thus *go out of existence* for eight years, or was Wisconsin’s seminary simply transferred to St. Louis where it operated congruently with Concordia until 1878, where it once again was transferred back to Wisconsin soil, this time resuming classes in rented quarters in Milwaukee?



Concordia Seminary St. Louis until 1882
Courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

The Wisconsin Synod's centennial history, *Continuing in His Word*, provides the generally accepted—if not official interpretation—of the May 1869 agreement. It reports that this agreement began to be duly implemented in the spring of 1870: "The Seminary graduated its last candidate in the spring of 1870. The undergraduates were transferred to St. Louis, and the seminary department at Watertown closed its doors."¹⁴ It also reports that there has historically been some difference of opinion about what exactly the changes brought on by the Missouri-Wisconsin agreement meant.¹⁵ The centennial history insightfully points out that it was the intention of the original arrangement that both the students *and their professor* make the transfer. It is to the credit of the Missouri Synod that even after Wisconsin proved unable to carry out a portion of the agreement—the sending of a theological professor to teach at St. Louis—Missouri still honored its agreement with Wisconsin and allowed the Wisconsin seminary students at St. Louis to retain their own group identity.¹⁶ Thus *Continuing in His Word* concluded: "We are therefore accustomed to think of these years between 1870 and 1878 as a part of the history of our own Seminary, the continuity thus being left unbroken."¹⁷

The Wisconsin Men of the St. Louis Years of WLS

Any discussion regarding the personnel of the St. Louis years of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary must begin with Adolf Hoenecke. Ironically, while Hoenecke was the professor called by Wisconsin Synod to move to St. Louis and teach there—representing Wisconsin and undoubtedly mentoring the Wisconsin students who would attend there—he never set foot in St. Louis and had no teaching career at Concordia.

The most basic reason was money. Although the Missouri-Wisconsin synodical school agreement was supposed to make it more economical to operate Northwestern, funds in the Wisconsin Synod continued to be less than what was needed to make the plan work as planned and promised. After a few years of trying, Wisconsin was forced to admit that it could not at the time afford to pay a theological professor's salary. Hoenecke remained in Watertown for several months after his seminary students left for St. Louis and continued teaching at Northwestern, but eventually accepted a call to St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, where he served as pastor for the rest of his life.¹⁸ Hoenecke's eyesight and his wife's fragile health were also concerns, along with the fact that the venerable professor disliked traveling over long distances. Synod folklore records that Hoenecke did not relish teaching theology in the shadow of C. F. W. Walther, who had been teaching at St. Louis for nearly two decades—a subtle indication that already in the 1870s Walther's reputation as a churchman and theological educator was considerable.

Continuing in His Word provides a listing of the Wisconsin men who were part of the St. Louis years of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: Henry Hoops, Julius Haase, J. Hodwalker, C. Althof, William Bergholz, Ad. Toepel, W. Hinnen-thal, M. Denninger, O. Hoyer, Erdm. Pankow, Franz Pieper, Reinhold Pieper,

Ed. Hoyer, B. Nommensen, Wm. Jaeger, And. Schroedel, A. Petri, O. Koch, Michael Pankow, August Pieper and John P. Koehler. Many of these men would go on to be prominent churchmen in the Wisconsin Synod and the larger Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, which was founded in Milwaukee at Bading's church in July 1872. Two of the Pieper brothers, Franz and Reinhold, would later be called by the Missouri Synod to serve as seminary professors and presidents. After a brief career as a Wisconsin Synod parish pastor, Franz Pieper was called to serve on the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, to teach alongside of Walther. Pieper eventually became Walther's successor and had lengthy tenures as seminary president and president of the Missouri Synod before his death in 1931. Reinhold also served as a WELS pastor before being called to serve as professor and president of Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, and to concurrently serve as pastor of two Missouri congregations. He died in 1920.



Prof. Gottlieb Schaller
Image from *80 Eventful Years*
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Three of the Wisconsin Synod men who attended Concordia, St. Louis went on to have prominent careers as WELS seminary professors: Eugen Notz, August Pieper and John Philipp Koehler. Pieper and Koehler eventually became bitter theological opponents in the intra-synodical Protestant Controversy and were college and seminary schoolmates of John Schaller. While Schaller's background was thoroughly Missourian—his father was a Wilhelm Loehe missionary—Schaller eventually took calls to serve Wisconsin Synod institutions, first to Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, and then to Wisconsin's seminary in Wauwatosa, a suburb of Milwaukee. At Wauwatosa, he became a colleague of Pieper and Koehler. August Pieper, John P. Koehler and John Schaller eventually devel-

oped the "Wauwatosa Theology," a renewed approach to theology which emphasized exegetical theology as the starting point in doing theology according to the *sola scriptura* principle of the Lutheran Reformation.

The Building and Locale of the St. Louis Years of WLS

For a better part of a decade, the Missouri-Wisconsin synodical school arrangement worked well. Because of its inter-synodical struggles with the Buffalo Synod, the Missouri Synod had developed a significant presence in the state of Wisconsin even before the Wisconsin Synod was founded in 1850.

Missouri congregations in the upper Midwest provided an influx of students for the school in Watertown. Prof. Friedrich Stellhorn was the Missouri man who was called to teach at Northwestern University, which later experienced a name change to the more modest Northwestern College.

The magnanimous Walther made the Wisconsin Synod students welcome at Concordia, St. Louis. Like its Wisconsin counterpart, Concordia also had a most humble beginning, being founded on December 9, 1839, in a one-room log cabin, initially at the settlement of Dresden, Perry County, Missouri.¹⁹ At the time of its founding, the seminary appeared more like a glorified Lutheran elementary school than a serious theological seminary. It was incorporated with the state of Missouri as "Concordia College," a name incidentally which is legally retained to this day. Eleven students made up the first student body: seven boys and four girls, the oldest being fifteen, while the youngest student was five-year-old Sarah von Wurmb.²⁰ As a result of the founding of the Missouri Synod, the fledging seminary was transferred to St. Louis and was located in a modest two story brick structure, designed by Martin Stephan, Jr. It was dedicated on June 11, 1850.²¹ Because of a constant increase of students, the original 1850 building—located on the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Winnebago Street in south St. Louis—was added onto several times. "A right wing was erected in 1852; the center section, filling the gap between the two wings, was built during 1856–1857."²² Additional stories were later added to the wings to further accommodate the influx of students. In the decade that Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary operated together with Concordia Seminary, St.

Louis, the Jefferson Avenue building was the physical plant and campus for WLS.

The locale around the seminary could readily be described as truly a "Lutheran neighborhood." Longtime Concordia Seminary president Ludwig Fuerbringer was a student at Concordia beginning in 1882 [shortly after the WLS years at St. Louis] during the final years of Walther's life. He wrote a description of the seminary and its neighborhood in the second portion of his reminiscences. The area around the seminary was known as the "Concordia District" or "Holy Cross District." Holy Cross Ev. Lutheran Church was constructed in 1867 and was located on the next block to the west, with Concordia Publishing House a block east and north of the seminary, along Jefferson Avenue, still its current location. The Lutheran elementary school of Holy Cross was down the street from the seminary on Jefferson. Going to the west, on Clara or Texas Avenue, were the homes of most of the seminary professors, Walther, Guenther, Schaller and Pieper, along with the parsonage of Pastor George Stoeckhardt of Holy Cross.²³ Across the street from Holy Cross, heading east, was the Lutheran hospital, where seminary students regularly ministered to patients under the tutelage of Stoeckhardt—the forerunner of seminary field work training in the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods.

Fuerbringer relates that while many members of the Holy Cross parish lived in the neighborhood around the church, the area in the 1870s and 1880s was not densely settled. Right past the seminary on Jefferson Avenue ran a mule-drawn street car line which was used by the students to go downtown or to other Missouri Synod congregations in St. Louis. Crushed stone was the usual street paving method in St. Louis in the late nineteenth century, which the weather regularly turned into either a grey paste or into a powdery dust.²⁴

During the WLS St. Louis years, Concordia students experienced attending services at the congregations that made up the *Gesamtgemeinde*, the "joint parish." This was a unique example of congregational polity initiated by Walther. It ultimately consisted of a joint parish made up of four churches, with Walther serving as the head pastor (*Pfarrer*) of Trinity congregation (1839), in addition to the three other "district churches." Each of these district churches had its own pastor, who served as an assistant (vicar) to Walther. Immanuel Lutheran Church (1848) began as a daughter to Trinity and became the second "district church" of the joint parish. The area around the seminary became the third district of Trinity, known as the Concordia District. Holy Cross Lutheran Church was established in 1858 in that district. The congregation first met in the chapel at Concordia Seminary. The fourth district started as a Lutheran elementary school district, which eventually resulted in Zion Lutheran Church being founded in 1860. This joint parish arrangement lasted until January 1889, when it was acrimoniously dissolved. Since no Wisconsin Synod congregation existed at the time in St. Louis or even Missouri, Wisconsin's students attended Sunday worship at one of the four congregations of the joint parish.



St. Louis—Concordia, Holy Cross, Seminary District
 Courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

The Missouri Men of the St. Louis Years of WLS

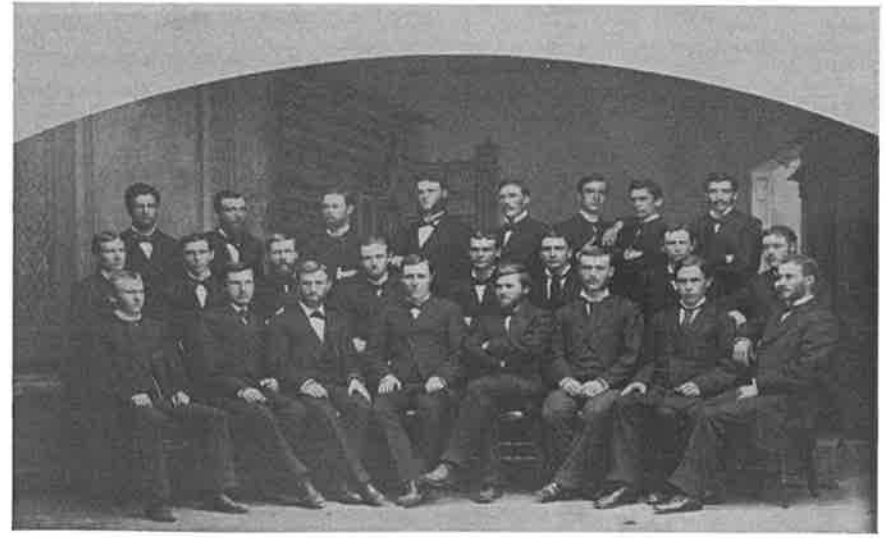
When WELS seminarians arrived at Concordia in the spring of 1870, they enrolled in a seminary that was already a generation old. Concordia—at least by nineteenth century standards—had an impressive physical plant and grounds and was rapidly becoming one of the largest Protestant seminaries in the United States. Concordia Seminary was actually becoming a victim of its own success. The Missouri Synod was itself growing rapidly in the 1870s, which produced an increase in the seminary enrollment. In addition to students from its own synod, Concordia also saw in the 1870s an influx of students from its sister synods such as the Norwegian Synod as well as Wisconsin.

Regardless of their synodical membership, Concordia, St. Louis students during the 1870s were instructed by an impressive theological faculty. C. F. W. Walther “was the faculty” according to August Pieper’s “Anniversary Reflections.”²⁵ It is hard to underestimate the influence of Walther as a theological educator and churchman. His legacy will be discussed later.

While Walther worked hard to assemble a quality faculty at St. Louis, two of his 1870s colleagues eventually proved to be significant disappointments. Friedrich Schmidt—who as a youth was confirmed by Walther—became Walther’s chief opponent in the bitter Election Controversy. Eduard Preuss was teaching at Concordia when the first Wisconsin students arrived in 1870, but soon defected to Roman Catholicism. Ironically, while he was still a Lutheran, Preuss wrote a well-regarded treatise on the doctrine of justification which is read and valued to this day.

The majority of the 1870s Concordia faculty proved their mettle and gave the seminary years of faithful service. Franz Pieper, previously mentioned, arrived in 1877 to assist in the teaching of dogmatics and other subjects and remained on the St. Louis faculty for the rest of his life. Rev. Theodore Brohm and Rev. E. A. Brauer, local Missouri Synod pastors, taught for part of the 1870s. Martin Guenther, Rudolph Lange, and Gottlieb Schaller, father of John Schaller, also served on the faculty during the WLS St. Louis years.²⁶

Besides Walther, the most influential professor for the Wisconsin men during this time appears to be Prof. George Stoeckhardt. Pieper wrote an encomium to Stoeckhardt, “Stöckhardt’s Significance in the Lutheran Church of America,” in which he pays a glowing tribute to the exegetical method Stoeckhardt taught in the classroom. Pieper maintained that Stoeckhardt’s exegesis gave new life to the study of dogmatic theology: “Thus Stoeckhardt has served to renew the faith and theology of many and has implanted fresh, new life into the dogmatic training of a church quickly growing old.”²⁷ Stoeckhardt’s influence on men like Pieper, Koehler, and Schaller led directly to the development of the Wauwatosa Theology.



*St. Louis Class of 1880 with J. P. Koehler
Courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.*

The Curriculum of the St. Louis Years of WLS

There did not appear to be much of an enrollment process involved for students matriculating at Concordia during the 1870s. Paperwork and enrollment forms appear to be minimal. Apparently all that was necessary to enroll at the seminary was to present one’s academic credentials to the president of the institution [Walther] and to have one’s name, birthday, hometown, and preparatory school recorded in the seminary’s matriculation registry. This registry is preserved in the seminary’s archives and serves as a contemporary written record of the makeup of the student body during the 1870s. In addition, in 1875 the Missouri Synod began publishing a joint catalog for all of their synodical schools. Each student’s name and his home synod were also listed in these catalogs.

The curriculum of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis is also listed in these catalogs. The curriculum followed the standard format of courses and classes in the four branches of theology: exegetical, systematic, historical and practical. In exegetical theology, the usual hermeneutics, isagogics of the Old and New Testaments and various exegesis courses were taught. When George Stoeckhardt commenced teaching (1878)—while still pastor at Holy Cross—he began the practice of teaching exegesis on biblical books which were integral in understanding God’s plan of salvation: Genesis, Psalms and Isaiah in the Old Testament and Galatians, Ephesians and Romans in the New Testament. This practice continues to be emulated at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to this day.

For systematic theology, Walther used the medium of Latin, a method of pedagogy not always appreciated by his students:

In dogmatics, the 'Baier hour,' he [Walther] was indeed always intellectually interesting, but spiritually he often seemed dry. That is in part, of course, because of the nature of teaching dogmatics. It deals to such a large extent with making distinctions between concepts and with logically grasping them, with intellectual operations that do not touch the heart. In Walther's case this was worse because he kept the Latin textbook and stubbornly adhered to using the Latin language in teaching.²⁸

In *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler acidly commented on Walther's teaching style in dogmatics class:

Walther's hobby, the Latin disputation, with Latin the medium of instruction . . . was an antiquated scholasticism and besides would have kept the whole study of theology still more in subjection to the 17th century theologians of the Lutheran church.²⁹

In addition to learning dogmatics from the Baier text, 1870s Concordia students also studied ethics, polemics and symbolics. Church history courses included the history of dogma, patristics, and "ecclesiastical archaeology" (*kirchliche Archäologie*). Pastoral theology was taught by Walther, using



St. Louis Class of 1881 with John Schaller
Courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

successive versions of his renowned pastoral theology text, *Amerikanisch-lutherische Pastoraltheologie*. Catechetics, homiletics, theological encyclopedics and methodology and English debate were also taught.³⁰

During their final seminary year, each Concordia class posed for a group picture at a local studio. Copies of many of these class pictures have been preserved at Concordia Historical Institute, located on the grounds of the current Clayton seminary campus.

To Milwaukee: The End of the St. Louis Years of WLS

While the years Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary spent on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis serve as a sterling example of inter-synodical cooperation, the joint arrangement actually lasted less than a decade. The agreement never worked exactly as planned at the May 1869 Milwaukee meeting. Wisconsin dutifully sent its students to St. Louis and Missouri in turn sent considerable numbers of its students to Northwestern in Watertown, but Wisconsin was never able to send a professor to St. Louis. Throughout the agreement, Missouri had a professor in Watertown.

Why did the arrangement end? Fraternal disagreement between Missouri and Wisconsin over the state synod issue was the main reason. The constitution of the Ev. Lutheran Synod Conference—Missouri and Wisconsin were both charter members—called for an effort toward "fixing the territorial boundaries of the synods, provided that language does not separate them."³¹ The St. Louis years of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary had barely begun when the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods disagreed over the issue of forming state synods within the Synodical Conference to eliminate competition and rivalry among its constituent members. The 1876 Synodical Conference convention in St. Paul, Minnesota unanimously passed a resolution in support of establishing state synods among the members of the Synodical Conference.³²

An important element of the state synod plan was joint educational institutions. The 1876 resolution called for the constituent synods to dissolve their seminaries in favor of one joint seminary which would train pastors for each synod of the Synodical Conference.³³ Undoubtedly this desire was influenced by the seminary arrangement already existing between Missouri, Wisconsin and the Norwegian Synod. Wisconsin's response to the 1876 state synod overtures directly led to not only a dispute with Missouri, "the State Synod Controversy," but it also ultimately ended the St. Louis years of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The formation of a state synod in Wisconsin was a touchy and weighty issue. The Wisconsin Synod at the time had no congregations outside of the state of Wisconsin, but the Missouri Synod already had numerous congregations within the state. While the 1877 synod convention supported the idea of independent state synods in principle, it could not agree to form a state synod with Missouri congregations in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin delegates sensed that the Missouri men within the state of Wisconsin would

want to see such a state synod join the Missouri Synod as a district. Wisconsin would thus lose its independent identity and thus amalgamate with Missouri.

This fear had already been expressed with the 1869 St. Louis-Watertown agreement but it had been allayed. The 1876 Synodical Conference resolutions caused these fears to be duly expressed again.³⁴

The end result of the proposed state synod plan was that the Wisconsin Synod chose to completely reject it and the accompanying joint seminary proposal.³⁵ Koehler's *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* devotes a considerable amount of ink in reporting the testiness which these decisions created between Missouri and Wisconsin. Koehler provides translations of numerous letters written by the leaders of both synods as these men discussed the merits and demerits of the state synod plan.³⁶ While Walther and the other Missouri men clearly were offended and undoubtedly felt that Wisconsin was being more than a bit ungrateful for the use of their St. Louis seminary, Wisconsin realized that its very existence as a synod was at stake.

"Thus woven into the discussion not to participate in the Synodical Conference's joint seminary was the need for the Wisconsin Synod to have its own seminary, that is, to move its seminary work from St. Louis back to Wisconsin, specifically Milwaukee."³⁷ Officially, the St. Louis-Watertown arrangement came to an end when Wisconsin passed a resolution at their 1877 synod convention that "the Synod resolve that next September we open our seminary in Milwaukee."³⁸

In his synod history, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, Prof. Edward Fredrich summarized the decisions of the 1877 Wisconsin Synod convention this way: "The result was the return of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from St. Louis to Milwaukee and the re-engagement of Pastor Hoenecke as a Wisconsin theological teacher."³⁹ Despite the famous charge of Walther, that what Wisconsin did at their 1877 synod convention was ungodly [*widergoettlich*], despite young August Pieper's reluctance to leave the familiar surroundings of Concordia, St. Louis, Wisconsin's decision stood.⁴⁰ Wisconsin's seminary enrollment at the new Milwaukee seminary began slowly—much like the Watertown years—but enrollment increased steadily. Fifteen years after the move from St. Louis to Milwaukee, a new seminary building was dedicated in 1893 in Wauwatosa, which served the synod until the completion of the Thiensville seminary campus in 1929.

The Legacy of the St. Louis Years of WLS

Despite its existence of less than a decade, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's St. Louis years left a legacy which helped to significantly define the seminary to this day. While the State Synod Controversy led to temporary frosty relations between Missouri and Wisconsin, these hard feelings were largely forgotten within a couple of years, when the Wisconsin Synod stood and confessed biblical truth alongside Missouri in the bitter Election Contro-

versy—which tore a large hole in the Synodical Conference. One lasting legacy of the St. Louis years of WLS is that it fostered the doctrine and practice of Synodical Conference Lutheranism within the Wisconsin Synod, a type of Lutheranism that the Wisconsin Synod seeks to confess and practice to this very day. Wisconsin seminarians were taught by Missouri professors, thus helping to establish an affinity between the two synods which lasted several generations, until church fellowship issues began to cause the synods to drift apart in the 1940s and 1950s.

Moreover, in this bicentennial year of Walther's birth (1811), it must be asserted that the St. Louis years of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary gave the WELS a lasting Walther legacy. This has been consistently noted in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, the theological journal of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: "Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther lives on in the theology of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod."⁴¹ Walther and the St. Louis years of WLS significantly shaped both the theology and curriculum of Wisconsin's seminary and thus, the Wisconsin Synod as a whole. An entire generation of WELS pastors was taught by Walther-trained men at the Wauwatosa Seminary: John P. Koehler, August Pieper and John Schaller. Pieper in his "Anniversary Reflections," noted: "Our assignment is not to regard his [Walther's] person as sacrosanct, but to recognize, preach, and preserve his gospel and to renew and continue his influence."⁴²

Lastly, the seeds of the Wauwatosa Theology were sown in St. Louis. Partially in reaction to Walther's methodology of teaching dogmatics, future WELS seminary professors Koehler, Pieper and Schaller developed a genuine affinity and appreciation for the exegesis and exegetical method of Prof. George Stoeckhardt. Stoeckhardt's emphasis on exegesis was taken north to Wisconsin, where it served as the genesis of the Wauwatosa Theology, an approach to seminary training and theology in general which emphasizes exegetical theology as the starting point of doing theology, exegetical theology which then provides the raw material for doing systematic, historical and practical theology. This is the emphasis of the seminary curriculum at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to this day. Pieper wrote in tribute to his former teacher:

Thus Stoeckhardt became the preserver of what we received through Walther. The more we become like Stoeckhardt in his theology taken directly from Scripture, the more faithfully we will stand by the only thing Walther wanted with his dogmatics, the imperishable Word of Scripture, the eternal gospel.⁴³

The Latin church father Tertullian asked: "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" If one were to ask: "What does Concordia Seminary, St. Louis have to do with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon?"—an examination

of the nineteenth century historical record and the personalities involved would prompt the succinct answer: "Much."

This paper was publically presented at the 2010 annual meeting of WLS Alumni, Mequon, Wisconsin, the 2010 biennial meeting of the Lutheran Historical Conference, St. Paul, Minnesota, and the 2010 WELS Historical Institute annual meeting, Mequon, Wisconsin. It is being published with the full permission of the Lutheran Historical Conference, which also intends to publish the article in the *Journal of the Lutheran Historical Conference* at a later date.

ENDNOTES

1. 1862 Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, Arnold O. Lehmann, trans., *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 1998), 14.
2. Max Lehninger, ed., *Continuing in His Word: The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), 146.
3. Immanuel P. Frey, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1863–1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (July 1963), 180.
4. *Ibid.*, 181.
5. Edward C. Fredrich, "The Parting of Professor J. P. Koehler and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1983), 36.
6. J. L. Neve, *History of the Lutheran Church in America*, third rev. ed., (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), 235.
7. *Continuing in His Word*, 140.
8. *Continuing in His Word*, 159.
9. "Proceedings of the 18th Convention of the German Evangel. Luther. Synod of Wisconsin and Other States," (Part 2), Arnold O. Lehmann, trans., *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 21, no. 2 (October 2003), 14.
10. John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 2nd ed., edited and with an introduction by Leigh D. Jordahl, (Sauk Rapids, Minnesota: Sentinel Printing Company for the Protestant Conference, 1981), 130.
11. Gary R. C. Haertel, "The History of St. John, Milwaukee," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1986), 45.
12. Proceeding of the 19th Convention of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Wisconsin and Other States," (Part 2) Arnold O. Lehmann, trans., *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 22, no. 2 (October 2004), 11.
13. *Ibid.*, 11–12. *Nota Bene*: In these convention minutes, Hoenecke's first name is spelled Adolph, although the spelling Adolf is the spelling that has been historically used.
14. *Continuing in His Word*, 141.
15. *Ibid.*, 142.

16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Arthur Hoermann, *Our Northwestern College: The Story of its Origin and Growth*, Hans K. Moussa, trans., (Watertown, Wisconsin: Northwestern College, 1915), 23.
19. Carl S. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower: Concordia Seminary During One Hundred and Twenty-five Years Toward a More Excellent Ministry 1839–1964*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 1.
20. *Ibid.*, 5.
21. *Ibid.*, 24–25.
22. *Ibid.*, 25.
23. Ludwig E. Fuerbringer, *Persons and Events: Reminiscences of Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer, Continuation of 80 Eventful Years*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 212–213.
24. *Ibid.*, 218.
25. August Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, vol. 3., Curtis A. Jahn, ed., (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 264.
26. Meyer, 297.
27. August Pieper, "Stöckhardt's Significance in the Lutheran Church of America," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, vol. 3., 425.
28. Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 237.
29. Koehler, 153.
30. *Katalog der Lehranstalten der deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. St. für das Schuljahr 1876–77*, (St. Louis: Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1877), 10.
31. Armin W. Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 77.
32. *Ibid.*, 79.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, 82–83.
35. *Ibid.*, 83.
36. Koehler, 144–159.
37. Schuetze, 84.
38. "1877 Wisconsin Synod Proceedings," quoted in Schuetze, 84.
39. Edward C. Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 58.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Wilbert R. Gawrisch, "Foreword: The WELS' Walther Heritage," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 3–5. See also John M. Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C. F. W. Walther," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 104, no. 1 (Winter 2007), 15–51.
42. Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 270.

43. Pieper, "Stöckhardt's Significance in the Lutheran Church of America," 426.

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Looking Back

25 years ago – 1987

- The Wisconsin Synod in convention authorizes the Commission on Inter-Church Relations to appoint a committee of three to meet with three members of the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod to begin preliminary planning for a new Synodical Conference. This resolution eventually results in the formation of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference in 1993.
- Several churches resisting the coming ELCA merger break from the ALC to form the American Association of Lutheran Churches [AALC].

50 years ago – 1962

- The Lutheran Church in America (LCA) is formed by the merger of the United Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the Augustana Synod.
- The Rhodesian Lutheran Church (WELS mission in Rhodesia, today Zambia) adopts the name, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA).
- WELS missionaries Richard Mueller and Raymond Cox make an initial survey into Nyasaland (today, Malawi).
- The Wisconsin Synod's participation in the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nigeria ceases as a result of the break in fellowship with the Missouri Synod.
- Pastor Ernst H. Wendland is called to begin a worker training program for the Lutheran Church of Central Africa.
- The Orthodox Lutheran Conference (formed in 1951 by pastors, a professor, and congregations who left the Missouri Synod for doctrinal reasons) dissolves. Most of the remaining pastors and congregations join the Wisconsin Synod.
- The Wisconsin Synod's Manpower Committee reports, "The continuous and aggravated manpower shortage remains a major problem confronting our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod." Hope for the future is expressed, however, because of the record enrollments at our synodical schools.

75 years ago – 1937

- The Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Poland is organized. The Wisconsin Synod had been supporting this German Lutheran mission since 1923.

- Pastor William Schweppe of the Wisconsin Synod arrives in Nigeria as the first resident missionary for the Synodical Conference in that African nation. The mission already has 32 mission stations. Pastor Schweppe serves 16 stations in the northern part of the Nigerian mission and resides at Obot Idim and soon becomes the mission's first superintendent. Schweppe is accompanied by Missionary Vernon Koeper and Nurse Helen Kluck.
- Dr. Martin Luther College graduates 19 candidates for the teaching ministry, all of whom receive calls. Synod President Brenner indicates that the synod is facing a shortage of teachers.
- President Brenner reports that 26 candidates for the pastoral ministry were graduated from the Seminary in Thiensville plus three Wisconsin Synod students were graduated for service in our synod from the Missouri Synod's seminary in Springfield. In addition 16 candidates from our seminary and one from Springfield had been waiting for a year or more to be assigned. There are only three pastoral calls available for the 46 candidates who were available for service.

100 years ago – 1912

- A document, called the Madison Settlement or *Opgjør* in Norwegian, attempts to unite Norwegian Lutherans in one church body. The *Opgjør* claims to settle the Election Controversy in Midwestern Lutheranism (this controversy began in 1879 and tore the Synodical Conference apart) by allowing both "versions" of the doctrine of election to stand side by side as valid ways of teaching. The vast majority of the Norwegian Synod pastors accepted the *Madison Agreement*. A minority does not, but remains in the group for the time being. In 1918 thirteen of these pastors who refused to participate in the merger will form the synod known today as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS).
- Norwegian Synod begins mission work in Kwangchow (Honan Province), China. George Oliver Lillegard is the first missionary.
- Ground is broken for a new gymnasium at Northwestern College in Wauwatertown in April 1912 and the building is dedicated on October 20. That morning President August Ernst of Northwestern receives a congratulatory telegram from U.S. President William Howard Taft. The telegram reads:

I congratulate you and your associates on the occasion of the dedication of the new gymnasium of Northwestern College. From my boyhood I have been on terms of intimacy with men of your church; for in my home town more than one-third of our people are Germans, a great majority of whom are Lutherans. I cannot too highly commend

their sturdy character and reliance for the great part they have taken in our civilization.. Those whom I knew best were the leaders of those Germans who went into the Civil War to uphold the union, vindicate freedom and eradicate slavery. I understand that your college strives for religion, liberal education and good health. I wish you every success and feel sure that your efforts will be good for the church, the people of the church and the country.

William Howard Taft

The 1912 gymnasium now serves as the music auditorium for Luther Preparatory School

- August Pieper, professor at the Wisconsin Synod's seminary in Wauwatosa, publishes *Biblishe Hausandechten*, a book of daily devotions.

125 years ago – 1887

- Michigan Lutheran Seminary moves from Manchester, Michigan, to its current location in Saginaw. The first building is erected on land donated by the synod's president, Pastor Christoph Eberhardt of St. Paul's in Saginaw.
- The Anti-Missouri Brotherhood, a fellowship of pastors and congregations of the (old) Norwegian Lutheran Synod, leaves the Norwegian Synod over the doctrine of election. These pastors and congregations rejected the doctrine of election as taught in the Synodical Conference in favor of teaching election in view of faith (*intuitu fidei*). In 1890 this group joins with the Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod and the Norwegian Danish Conference to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.

150 years ago – 1862

- President Bading in his annual report to the synod states, "Since the beginning of the synod the preaesidium of the synod has not felt the lack of preachers as they did this past synodical year. Old synodical congregations have been standing orphaned for years. . . requests for preachers coming from new congregations who had not as yet joined the synod could not even be granted a hearing. How can we find an answer if we do not earnestly think about starting our own seminary and putting our hands more seriously and with greater faith to the task? . . . We must in our country, in our synod, establish a source from which workers will flow."
- The Wisconsin Synod in convention resolves to "incorporate as *Die Deutsche Evangelisch Lutherische Synode von Wisconsin und angrenzenden Staaten*, and that its present officers and their successors be au-

thorized to purchase, to sell, to receive bequests, to offer complaints, to receives complaints, etc. in its name, and that present officers be authorized to let this be ratified by the state legislature."

- Pastor Johannes Muehlhaeuser celebrates his twenty-fifth anniversary in the ministry by returning to Germany to participate in the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Langenberg Mission Society. Muehlhaeuser was the first candidate for the ministry sent by this society to America.
- Luther College (the Norwegian Synod's worker training school) moves to Decorah, Iowa.

175 years ago – 1837

- Michigan is admitted as the 26th state and the first plans for a Michigan Lutheran Synod are discussed.
- The Langenberg Mission Society sends its first two candidates, Muehlhaeuser and Ortel, to North America. They serve in the New York Ministerium.

The WELS Historical Institute was given formal approval by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in convention in 1981 to organize for the purpose of collecting and preserving historical data and artifacts that are related to the various periods of Lutheranism in America, especially of the WELS. In recent years the synod took over the responsibility of maintaining the archives. The Institute maintains a museum and publishes a *JOURNAL* and *NEWSLETTER*. Membership is open. Fees are as follows, which include the subscription fees: Individual: \$20.00; Husband/Wife: \$25.00 (2 votes but only one publication issue); Congregation, School, Library, Corporation: \$40.00; and Student: \$15.00. Fees may be sent to the WELS Historical Institute, 2929 N. Mayfair Road, Milwaukee, WI 53222.

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