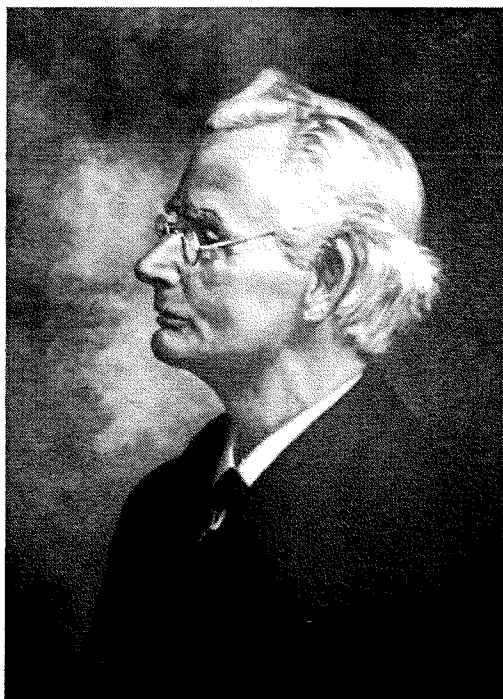


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Cover picture
Adolph Hoenecke

"The Lord has Helped Us Hitherto"¹
A History of the Loescher Family through World War II
and the Years Thereafter

Jonathan P. Loescher

Some people focus on the good times. Some say it will get better. Other people tighten their belts and thank God for their buckeye bread.²

This is the history of Johannes and Helene Loescher,³ and their children. Known to friends and family as Hans and Lene, they were married in 1923 by the arrangement of their parents. It seems fitting that this story begins in those troubled years of post-war Germany. God would lead them through many such years; indeed, through three governments and two countries. Most would say they were poor. They would tell you they were richly blessed.

Almost immediately after they were married, the young couple came to America, where they found a home in Buffalo, Minnesota. The Lord blessed them there with six children, but after a while Lene grew homesick. A doctor advised them to move back to Germany.

In 1934 Hans sent his family back, while he stayed behind to work and pay their way. His children were Gertrude, Esther, Gottfried (Fred), Theodore (Ted), Johannes (John), and Waldemar (Wally). Eberhardt was in the womb.

In Germany Again

Lene brought the children back to Neuwiese (Neuwirschnitz), where her family still lived. In those difficult days she was raising her six children alone, and all the while people were telling her that her husband would probably not come back. Finally it was too much for her to handle alone. She had to send some of the children to live with relatives. Ted and Fred lived with their aunt and uncle, Kurt and Marie Ebisch. They were kind people, and took good care of them. When Ted was sick with tonsillitis on his birthday, his aunt brought him an orange to make him feel better.

"I was tickled. Just the smell of it was great. It was the best present ever!"⁴ –
Ted

Within a year Hans' shoe shop burned down, and he rejoined his family in Germany. He found a place for them to live in Tierfeld, where he worked in the clay mines making red bricks. Before long Ted wanted to go to them, so his Uncle Kurt Ebisch packed him onto the back of a motorbike and took him to his family. A short time later, Fred came walking down the road with a backpack. Oddly enough, the family looked upset—likely because there were more mouths to feed now. These were very austere times, but they were also good times. The family was together and there was food, although there was little money to buy it.



Loescher and Jungkuntz families with their goats

Mom would send me to the butcher to buy a small piece of beef (2") which she would cook to make gravy for the kids, and dad would get the meat. I was so hungry, and wanted to eat that little piece of meat so badly! But I didn't dare. —Ted

Hans joined Hitler's *Kinderreichenbund*, an organization that offered aid to large families. Hitler had started the organization because he wanted Germany to grow. The *Kinderreichenbund* encouraged people to have children by paying out 10 marks per child per year, and offering cheap housing. In fact, there was a housing project in Hartenstein, where Hans grew up. Taking advantage of the cheap housing, Hans moved the family there, where he was given a lot on a hill. Lest we grow jealous over the free land, we should note that they had to excavate it themselves. It was hard work; done by hand in a solid slate hill.

The kids worked right along with their father. They dug out the hill and used the slate chips to build a wall around the property. They made a garden by picking out the slate chips and adding manure to the rocky soil. It was hard work, but those were some of their best days. There was food, and Hans actually got a job as the service manager for a textile manufacturer. There was a school that the kids went to, and a Lutheran free church.

There was a window over the walkway going into our house. If we saw someone coming, we would try to pour a pitcher of water onto their head. We were mischievous kids. Sometimes we would take a wallet, tie a string to it, and throw it to street in front of our home. When someone comes along and tries to pick up the wallet, you pull the string. One time John lost his wallet to an elderly gentleman. —Ted

The War

When Hitler first came to power, the Germans thought he was a great man. Because of him there was food again, and jobs. He built the Autobahn. He was against the Jews, the Jesuits, and the Communists, just like a lot of people back then. They didn't know the evil things he would do. They praised him—until their sons started dying in the war. By and by, there were hints of the atrocities too, though nobody guessed it was as bad as it was.

The soldiers would come door to door and ask, "Are you Arian or mixed?" If you answered mixed, they would take you to prison. They came to our house. John answered the door, and he didn't know what to say. He called out, "Mom, which one are we?" —Ted

The S.S came to town on a recruiting trip. They gathered up a bunch of young men and took them aside one by one. They said all kinds of nasty things to try to get the person mad. If he said anything back, he would be in the S.S. Some of them had heard about this and knew what was going on. They kept their mouths shut. Others did not, and they were volunteered for service.

The Nazi's weren't the only ones responsible for horrors during the war. The Allies had their part in this terrible war also. Many innocent civilians died in Allied bombing raids.

In 1945, from the 13th to the 15th of February, the Allies firebombed Dresden. They planned it so that the city would be totally destroyed. I had friends there. There was no reason for the bombing. The German army was tattered. The Russians were only miles away. At the time, there wasn't even anybody in Dresden. All the men were gone; it was mostly women and children. When the air raid sirens went off, my friend and his mother took off for the bomb



The Loescher house in Hartenstein

shelter. When they got there it was almost full, so they kept running to the evacuation site. But they didn't stop there either, they kept on running. There were explosions everywhere behind them. That evening 3,400 allied bombers turned the city to rubble. Then 2,700 more bombers dropped white phosphorous bombs everywhere, setting off a firestorm over the whole city. The fire sucked all the oxygen out of the air, and people either burned or suffocated. 220,000 died that night. When my friend went back, there were mountains of bodies piled at the evacuation site. Everyone in the bomb shelter suffocated. In Hartenstein, 60 miles away, we could see a bright orange horizon from the fire. There were other cities bombed like this, for which such firestorms had been planned—Berlin, Chemnitz, Zwickau, Hamburg, Darmstadt.⁵ —Eberhardt



Pastor Munder in his garden

Eventually the war came to Hartenstein. The American tanks shelled the castle and the town by day, and the B-52s dropped bombs at night. Sometimes they flew over during the day, too. There were so many that they blocked out the sun.

I remember seeing the first jet fighters. They were circling the bombers, and they shot down a few. They couldn't turn sharply enough to do much more damage than that, though.

One day an Allied pilot was shot down and parachuted into a nearby field. We came to see the plane, but, to our surprise, we found two pilots. A German had made an emergency landing in the same field, and we saw them smoking and chatting together in the cockpit of the German plane. It was the neatest thing I saw in the war. I don't know how they knew what the other was saying, but they were enjoying themselves.

The parachuting gave us an idea. One day we decided we wanted to make a parachute. We gave Eberhardt a bed sheet and told him to jump out of the



The castle at Hartenstein before the bombing

hayloft. He wouldn't fit through that little window, so we decided to try the bedroom window instead. "Are you sure the sheet will open up?" he asked. "It'll open," we said, and shoved him out the window. It didn't, but he landed in the garden without getting hurt too badly. —Ted

Between the bombing raids and the hungry soldiers, there wasn't much left to eat. Like everyone else, the Loeschers were starving. They did have a garden, though, and they grew raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, cherries, and vegetables. The kids would also walk around and take fruit from people's trees. Usually they picked it off the ground, but if no one was watching they might shake the tree a little.

They would pick the *Sauergrass*⁶ that grew down by the creek, and there was a certain sort of wild asparagus called *Otterzungen*⁷ that grew in the field in spring. Mom would boil it like spinach. She would put a little teaspoon of something like butter in the pot. Whatever it was, "fatty looking eyes" of it would float to the top.

"We would try to fish the little globs out and put them in our own bowl." — Ted

They kept rabbits for food, but they ran out of those too:

We were down to our last rabbit, and mom said we should save it until we were *really* hungry and had nothing else to eat—unless it got sick. If anyone saw it looking sick, we were supposed to tell her right away, and she would kill it and cook it. We didn't want to lose that last rabbit! Well anyhow, we were really hungry, so after two days John knocked the rabbit on the head with the back end of an axe and said, "Mom, it's sick!" —Ted

It finally got so bad that they had to eat their Guinea Pig:

"We cooked the Guinea Pig. It stunk up the house so bad that I still remember, but we ate it anyway." —Ted

Sometimes they would go out into the country to trade, because some of the farmers out there had a little extra food.

One time John and I were bringing the cart back from one of these trips—we had some rutabagas or something. I was pulling and John was pushing. As we went up the hill to our house the tank rounds started coming in all around us! I turned that wagon around right away, but John was already half-way down the hill. We probably ran three miles before we stopped. We finally had the guts to go home that night. They never hit the house, but our backyard was full of craters. We had fun picking up the shrapnel—it was everywhere. —Ted

When the fighting was at its worst Hans would gather his family and sing hymns.

"You're closer to God in those situations than you ever are. Dad would say, 'Come on, I'll play the organ⁸ and you sing.' And we sang and sang." —Ted

During one air raid, a barn got hit and the horse inside was killed.

"We were all like vultures in there, carving off the meat. There were so many people—it was all gone within half an hour." —Eberhardt

Everyone was starving in those days. There were burials nearly every week, as the elderly especially could not keep their strength. The church band at the head of the funeral procession would play *Christus is mein Leben, Sterben ist Gewinn*.⁹ We might wonder how they could live at all in such times. They say they did what they had to, and God brought them through.

In 1945 the S.S. moved into the castle at Hartenstein. The Allies planned a big air raid for Hitler's birthday. Machine gun casings fell from the P-51s through the window onto the floor of the Loescher's house. Afterward they saw the bullet holes all over the walls outside. B-52's dropped white phosphorous bombs on the castle. Dad was in the fire department, but couldn't go to the castle because Lene was giving birth to Jürgen. He sent Ted in his place, 16 years old at the time.

He came to me and said, 'You gotta go in my place.' I ran for my life. You could hear 'em everywhere—*patapatapatat*. We pumped water from the creek to put out the fire, but the P-51's came back and started blasting everything. We dropped that hose and let the castle burn. You should have seen

it—that hose shot up like a snake! We ran for the creek and never looked back. —Ted

In 1944 all the young men were required to join Hitler's *Volkssturm*, or National Guard. Everyone had already learned to march and shoot in the Hitler Youth, but in the *Volkssturm* they would mostly put up road blocks and other things to slow the enemy. They were also supposed to shoot any enemy soldiers they saw, but nobody did that. They weren't stupid. One time, the *Feldwebel* (Sergeant) ordered them to set up a barbed wire fence to try to slow the Allied advance. By noon the tanks were firing on them. When the *Feldwebel* gave them leave to go home for lunch, nobody even thought about returning.



Ted in the
Volkssturm

"I almost think he knew we weren't going to come back." —Ted

When the Americans took the city, the Germans were afraid.

We were told that we would die when the Americans or Russians came in. We thought the end had come. But after a couple days we found otherwise. They threw crackers and cigarette butts from their tanks. We stood by the tanks and dove for those butts when they threw them down. We brought them home to dad, and he would open them up and strip out the tobacco until he had enough to roll a new one. —Eberhardt

The Russian Zone

As bad as it was then, it was worse when the Soviets took over. The Americans were the ones who conquered much of the eastern section of Germany, but they gave a large portion to the Soviets at the Yalta Conference. The Germans in the Russian Zone felt they had been sold out.

The Russian soldiers murdered, raped, and plundered. The government took all their goods to 'redistribute' them, but nothing came back. They took the machines from factories, took all kinds of supplies, took the farmers crops—they looted the country. They even cut down much of the forest and hauled the wood away. The country was empty after the Russians came.

The Government gave out ration cards, but most of the time there was nothing left in the stores. You had to wait until the government decided to give you something.

You had to look in the newspaper. It might say something like, "Today all the people in Hartenstein can get a half a pound of marmalade," or honey, or something. One time it was molasses. We had to stand in line for hours before the store opened, which was always the case. Then we each had a spoon in our pockets so we could eat from it right away when we finally got it. It tasted terrible and it made us really sick.

There was never enough for everybody to get their ration. You had to stand in line all day, and you would probably get pushed out of the way if you were a child. Most of the time you never even got there. If you did, it was usually all gone by the time you got there. —Eberhardt

You could get about ten or twelve sacks of potatoes for a whole year, which wasn't a lot for thirteen people to live off of. There just wasn't enough food to go around. People would drink and smoke to satisfy their hunger. There were Cigarette rations—two packs per month for everyone over 18. There were liquor rations too; you could get some really strong Russian vodka.

Once a month each person could go to get a loaf of bread. It was a solid loaf, baked with ground buckeyes¹⁰ and acorns mixed with flour. Under normal circumstances no one would eat this, but it was different for them.

Mom kept the bread for the little ones. She just gave the loaf to the older ones, though, and told us to figure out how to make it last a month. We all had to find hiding places for our bread so the others wouldn't steal some of it. I would get out my loaf and slice off a piece, and all the little ones would be gathered around looking at me. I would give them a little piece too. I don't remember it, but they say that I stole their bread after mine was gone. I don't know.

But dad—he would squirrel some away in his desk. It didn't take long for the kids to figure it out. We all thought that he wouldn't notice if we just cut off a little slice. But when each of us cut off a little slice, there was never much of anything left for him when he came to get a piece of his bread! —Ted

Mom had to find hiding places for all the food, but the kids always found it. There was a cabinet in the master bedroom with a lock and key where she kept most of it. John got into that too, though—he worked at a machine shop, so he made his own key and let himself in anytime he wanted to.

Once the schools opened up again, the school kids got an extra loaf of bread every month. That meant so much to us! We usually had it eaten before we got home. —Eberhardt

Everyone who was able went to work. The Loescher boys worked side by side with their father making house shoes in their Grandpa's shoe workshop. They

worked all day and all week. After the Russians came they didn't have much material any more, but people would bring whatever they could find. Some would bring old coats to be cut up and turned into shoes. The shop didn't last long, though. Eventually the machines broke down, and they couldn't fix them—nobody had any spare parts.

The shelves in the stores were mostly empty. People would try to trade if they needed something, even though it was illegal. Since the food rations were so slim, the Loeschers would often trade shoes from the shop or some fabric leftover from Hans' textile workshop. He had managed to hide some away before the Russians took everything.

Sometimes the kids would take their fabric and shoes to trade in Thüringen. They had to be careful, just the same as during the war. The only difference was that they were evading the Russian police now, not dodging tanks. You could be thrown in jail for trading.



*Back row, from left: Esther, Christine, Joachim, Fred, John, Waldemar, Ted, Gertrude.
Front, from left: Eberhardt, Lene, Jürgen, Hans, Inge*

We had only one bicycle for those trips into the country, but we borrowed Uncle's bike too. It was patched so terribly that it seemed like it was always flat. Finally it got so bad that there was no fixing it, and we had to push it. That time the Russians caught us. They took away the food we traded for, and sent us home. They told us we would be convicted when we got home, and punished. So we pushed our bikes home. We were empty-handed, and hadn't eaten anything in days. Along the way we found a little potato in a field, and we split it. We each chewed on our half of the potato, just to have something in our mouths. I remember that potato. —Ted

Sometimes we could trade for a little rye. If there was any of that around, we would go in the evenings to pick the mouse turds and the little rocks out of our little pile of rye, and then grind it. Then in the morning we would boil it and eat it for breakfast, like oatmeal.

Also, whenever a farmer was digging out his potatoes, everyone would be standing around the field waiting for him to finish. After he was done, we all rushed out into the field to look for any that he missed. You'd come out with two or three." –Eberhardt



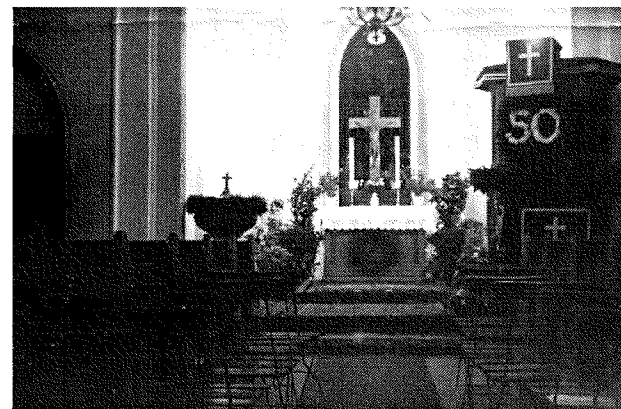
The church choir and band

Through all of this the family found strength and rest in God. Hans led his family in daily devotions and prayers every evening. As already noted, the family loved to sing hymns. They were all in the church choir, and many of them played in the church band besides. On Sunday mornings, John, Fred, and Ted would go up on the hillside to play hymns. John played the trombone, Fred played the tuba, and Ted played the trumpet. The music would echo through the valley. Then Hans would take his family to church, where he played the organ.

He kept his eye on us, even though he was the church organist. During the sermon he would take a peek down at us from the organ bench in the balcony to see if we were misbehaving. One time he threw a piece of chalk at us. –Ted

When they got home, they would have to tell what they remembered from the sermon:

Most of us could not remember anything to say. He asked Wally—Wally was probably six years old at the time, and he always had something. One time Dad said, "Anybody who knows what the sermon was about, raise your



The church in Hartenstein

hand." Wally was the only one who raised his hand. Dad said, "You oughta be ashamed! All you grown ups, and here is this little boy who is the only one that knows anything about the sermon! Alright Wally, what do you remember?" "**Galilee!**" he said. We had a hard time not to explode. I think dad had a hard time to keep from laughing too. –Ted

Early in 1947, Fred, John, Wally, Esther, and Ted found out that they were still U.S. citizens, which gave them a chance to go back to America. It was everybody's dream to get out of East Germany before starving to death. Those who had been born in the U.S. and were under 18 still had U.S. citizenship, as long as they hadn't served in the German army.

The five of them went to the American Consulate in Berlin to arrange for going back to America. They needed their birth certificates to be sent over in order to confirm their citizenship. They also needed someone to sponsor them, ensuring that they would be employed upon arrival in America. The government was paying for the boat ticket, and they wanted the assurance that they would be repaid.

Just before they left the Consulate to go home, somebody brought them each a Red Cross package.

When we got to Berlin there was a lot of black marketeering. Someone took us into a basement where we could buy stuff. I could either buy a pound of butter for 200 Marks (at least \$160 today), or a pack of cigarettes for 180 Marks. Since I didn't have 200 Marks, I decided to buy the cigarettes. I bought a pack of Camels, and that was great! Then we went to the American Consulate, and they gave us each a ten pound package from the Red Cross. We opened them, and inside were cookies and chocolate and cornflakes. Anybody with a bowl of cornflakes in those days was in paradise—we were beside ourselves! And there was a box of Lucky Strikes! If only I would have known! We hadn't seen this much in years.

Back at work, when we were smokin' the other guys would gather around and watch. They were waiting until I would finish and throw the butt, and then they would jump on it. Every once in a while I was good to 'em and let 'em have a suck. —Ted

There was a little ditty back then:

*Kippen stechen, dass ist sehr modern
Kippen stechen, tun auch feine Herrn
Kommt ein Mann die Strasse entlang
Hat am Stock eine Nadel d'ran
'Bumps'—hat er eine Kippe d'ran.*¹¹ —Wally

There were cans of powdered milk in those care packages. Wally and I would hide them away and eat them. We would add a little water and make a paste—thick like honey or syrup—and we gobbled it down. We got really sick, but it was food. —Eberhardt

There would be more of those trips before their citizenship was finally confirmed, and each time they could get another Red Cross package.

We had to be careful when we went to Berlin. We would take the train from the Hartenstein Train Station. Sometimes the Russians would stop the train and search it. If they caught us, we would be sent home and punished. Inspectors would come through to find people who weren't supposed to be there or people who were transporting goods to sell. They put those people in jail. Once we got to Berlin, we had to be careful not to be seen crossing into the American sector. In those days there was no wall yet, but there were watchtowers and guards. —Ted

They had to go back to the Consulate a second time to answer some more questions. This time, it also happened that there was a Lutheran choral fest in the British zone. As long as they were going that way, they wanted to take their choir too. But again, they would have to be sneaky. Their cousin Reinhold took them to the border in his truck and left. The choir crawled on through the fog across the no-mans land to avoid being seen by the Russian soldiers in the watchtowers. Crawling out of the fog, they came up to the place where the choirs were gathering.

That night we traded for eggs. We would poke holes in the eggshells and suck the insides out. The following day we were given some food. There were lots of choirs there, but our little choir from Hartenstein got a lot of good comments. We sang Psalm 42. —Ted

Considering the times and circumstances, there may not be a more appropriate psalm.

From the choir gathering they went on to the Consulate a second time and were given another Red Cross package. They were jubilant with all that good food in their hands to take back to the family.

Some time after this they made a trip to Thüringen to trade for food, but this time they were caught right away. The Russians stopped the train and filed everybody out. As punishment they made Ted chop wood for the *Bürgermeister* (mayor) all day for three Sundays. He did it once, and then the papers came in for him to leave for America. It was August of 1947.

Ted, Fred, and Esther left together. Three months later Wally and John would leave also, and Eberhardt would join them ten years later. All of them were very young at the time, Wally being the youngest at 14.

Mom cried her eyes out. Since she had nothing to give us to remember her by, she gave us all a handkerchief with her initials on it. A few years after we left she suffered a stroke. The health care in those days was so bad that nobody even came in to help her turn over. She died from her bed sores.

Mom was a hard worker; content with anything. She lived a hard life. It was hard on her to have so little to give her children when there was nothing to eat. —Ted

I feel bad for mom. She had 11 kids, and had to try to feed them with nothing. She loved us all. —Eberhardt

The three who left first took the train from Hartenstein to Berlin, where they got their tickets to America. There were too many people on that train, though. They had to switch trains and hide in a cattle car. In Berlin they boarded another train, heading for Bremerhaven. This time they did not have to be sneaky; they were guarded by American MP's.

"We were supposed to sit quiet, but I couldn't resist sticking my head out the train window to yell at those Russian soldiers." —Ted

Already onboard the ship they began to enjoy the rich blessings of life in America.

There was a lot of good food, and three meals a day. But during rough seas nobody came to eat. We would go in there and catch all the food as it was sliding off the tables. There was always plenty, but we stuffed our pockets on the way out. —Ted

Three months later, John came back from a trip to the American Consulate and told Wally, "We're going too. Don't worry about what our parents say; I'll work it out with them." They got back to Berlin easily, because by this time the underground network in Berlin was well established. From there they took a train to an old P.O.W. camp in Bremen. They stayed there for three weeks until they could get on a ship. As was often the case, there was no food there. For three weeks they ate nothing but their ration of oatmeal every morning. Finally the word came and they got on a train to Bremerhaven, where they boarded the ship bound for the United States.

In America all five went to work for the man who sponsored them, Otto Francke, their mom's second cousin. He was a good man, though very poor.

"He was so poor that he could afford only a can of beans for lunch, and even that he had to buy on credit because he had no money." —Ted

Naturally they weren't able to work there for long.

Fred went on to work for another farmer, who turned out to be a very difficult man. John would work for the Schuberts.

Ted also went on to work for a difficult man; a short little man with a temper. The farmer gave him a cold, drafty space up in the attic. He worked him very hard, and blamed him for everything that went wrong. To add to it all, the man's foul mouth made it even more difficult to learn English. For instance, it would take a while to figure out what *die Kühe* were supposed to be called.

Ted worked at other places also, and for good people, but they could never pay him much. After a few years, he was drafted and sent to Korea. When he got back, instead of going back into farming he went to trade school to become a draftsman. This, however, turned out to be a high stress job and a detriment to his health. Instead, he got a job as a custodian at a school, and worked there until he retired. To some it would have been a struggle of a life, but to him it was God's gracious providence that brought him to his best years. Again and again he has reminded us, "God has richly blessed me. I have a great family. My best years were with my family."

Esther worked for a harsh man who owned a grocery store. She took care of his whole house for a few dollars. When she would get together with her brothers on weekends, she would often come with tears in her eyes. The Franckes took her back for a while before she found a job with the Bielkes, who were very good to her.

Wally worked for the Sieg family. They were a very good family, although they could not pay him much. They did give him good clothes and good food, though—a bit too good at first. He was a skinny 4'5", and his famished body wasn't used to all that nourishment. It made him sick.

One day the pastor asked Wally if he had any interest in the public ministry. He would have done anything to get off the farm.

"It was hot, and I used to load hay, hoe, clean out the thistle patches, pick rocks, and whatever else had to be done. Then I did the morning and evening chores too." —Wally

So Wally enrolled at Dr. Martin Luther High School in New Ulm, Minnesota. He would go on to Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon. He was graduated from the seminary in 1961 and served congregations in Canada, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Conclusion

Wally's ordination fulfilled a lifelong dream for his father. Hans had always wanted to be a pastor himself, but didn't have the money to go to school. Instead, it was always his dream to have a son become a minister. Now that this had happened, his dream was to hear his son preach. It didn't seem possible, though, because the Communists would only let you visit relatives who were in West Germany. However, soon that dream became a reality.

After Lene died, the children in America tried to talk Hans into coming over. By this time he was an old man, and would not live much longer.

At first he didn't want to come. He didn't want to leave the younger children (who were mostly grown up by this time). Finally he agreed, "If you come, I'll come back with you." Everybody pitched in a little money, and they elected Eberhardt to go back to Germany to get their dad. The year was 1967.

Eberhardt flew to Frankfurt and rented a car to drive into East Germany. It took a day to get through the border control station. Everyone was interrogated; everything was searched. For three weeks he stayed in Hartenstein visiting with his dad and siblings. During the whole time he had to be careful not to talk to anyone outside the family about why he was there. In order to get his dad across the East German border, Eberhardt got a visa for him to visit a niece in West Germany. They couldn't cross the border together, though. Hans had to ride the train to avoid suspicion. On the other side they agreed that they would meet up at a certain restaurant.

"You should have seen how we jumped when we met up on the other side. We beat the Communists!" —Eberhardt

They went to the American Consulate in Frankfurt and spent three days there getting a visa to make the trip to America. After everything was ready, they went to the airport.

Dad was so excited at the airport. He was going to see his kids and grandkids. And he had never seen a big passenger airplane like that. You should have seen his eyes. It was all new stuff to him, and very mysterious. He had a big smile. —Eberhardt

On the plane the stewardess brought drinks and cigars.

I bought dad a drink. He looked at the cigars and said, "Can I have one of those too?" I said, "Yeah, dad, you can have one of those too." He thought he was the king of China! –Eberhardt

Everybody was there when they arrived in Minneapolis. They all went to Ted's house to celebrate. The next four months would be some of the happiest of Hans' life. He stayed with each of them for a little while, enjoying himself with his kids and grandkids. Then, finally, his last life's dream was fulfilled. Wally came down from Canada for a district convention, and was invited to preach at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. That Sunday Hans heard his son preach. Two days later, Hans Loescher died, a man full of blessings.

This covers the history of the Loescher family from 1923-1967. To those who have not lived through similar times, it is shocking to think that these things could ever actually happen. One might wonder how this family found anything to be thankful for. And yet, if you talk to them, they will all tell you that they have been greatly blessed, and they are greatly thankful. They have an appreciation for God's greater gifts, his Word and their families. They appreciate the prosperity which the younger generations mostly don't even notice. They have learned the difference between those blessings and true, lasting treasures in heaven. The reason is easy to see. Their father showed by his example that God's Word was precious to him, and he taught his children the same. They went to church and were taught to pay attention. When troubles came, their father taught his children to find peace in God's Word, leading them in hymns while the bombs fell. Later in life, the father's lessons stuck with his children. They continued to search the Scriptures and sing their hymns through some difficult days in America. Now, as those children have grown old and looked back on their lives, they are thankful. Their overwhelming thought is that God has been good.

All of us look at God's gracious blessings; his protection and preservation—his greatest blessing is our faith. –Eberhardt

Even in such poverty, we were blessed because of our faith. Now, in a life so full of goodies, it is difficult not to become too attached to all the material things that will be destroyed, either before or on Judgment Day. –Wally

Appendix 1—Paulina Augusta Loescher Helps Start the Free Church in Hartenstein

Because the union of Lutherans and Reformed in the State Church in Germany was so distasteful to true Lutherans, many throughout Germany were beginning to

meet separately. These groups would become the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche*. In the area around Hartenstein, groups in Planitz, Zwickau, Dresden, and other places were already gathering on Sunday afternoons to read the catechism and listen to sermons. In 1876, pastors from these congregations visited Hartenstein and encouraged the orthodox Lutherans there also to separate themselves from the State Church. Paulina Loescher heard these men and took action. Realizing that the Word of God alone is the rule and norm, in 1882 she left the state church. Her action encouraged others to do the same. It was a difficult move, though, because it caused hostility with those in town who belonged to the state church. Some of those were members of her own family, including her own mother. Three more families dared to take this step, and by 1902 there were nine families and thirty-seven souls in this bold little Hartenstein congregation. Paulina was Hans' grandmother.¹⁴

Appendix 2—Wally Enters the Public Ministry Only by God's grace and Special Guidance.

Wally had a strong desire to get off the farm, as well as a need to make some money. He decided to enroll in the ministerial course at New Ulm's Dr. Martin Luther High School. It wasn't that he had a special desire to be a minister. His pastor suggested it to him, and he liked the idea of getting off the farm.

Starting school was difficult, though, because he knew no English. He picked it up bit by bit, though, especially through studying Latin.

Our gracious God would use a severe accident to lead him to focus on the public ministry and decide to continue his studies at Northwestern College. This is how it happened:

After John was drafted during the Korean War, he asked Wally to use his '41 Pontiac while he was gone. One weekend, he and five buddies took it on a trip up to Minneapolis. After a day of fun and frivolity, they had a disagreement over which was the fastest way back to the car. Naturally, they split and raced. Wally raced across a parking lot, but didn't see the neck-high cable in the shadows on the other side. It caught him and flipped him head first onto the cement. The next thing he remembered, Ted was beside him in the hospital. Ted had stayed with him all night. After being released from the hospital, Wally stayed three weeks on a couch in Fred's house in Minneapolis. The whole event shook him up and led him to a new resolve to keep on studying for the ministry.

But still, even in his second year at Northwestern College he wanted to stop studying for the ministry. He told John that he actually wanted to enlist. John responded with one short sentence, "Don't do it, you will regret it later." That short sentence stuck in his memory.

I never would have made it in the public ministry in the WELS, had the LORD not found a way to keep me on track. It was only by his grace and special guidance. –Wally

Appendix 3—Eberhardt's Life in Germany and Immigration to America

Eberhardt was only twelve years old when the four brothers and Esther left for America. After graduating from *Grundschule*,¹⁵ he got an apprenticeship with a typesetter in a printshop. The Communists would shut down the shop before he had a chance to finish. They shut down almost all private businesses in those days. Instead of trade work, the Communists felt the future lay in mining and industry. So, Eberhardt went to work in the coal mine at the age of sixteen.

Mining is always dangerous work, and it was all the more so back then. There were a lot of cave-ins, the equipment was dangerous and poorly maintained, and the coal dust was everywhere.

Safety didn't mean a lot in those days. Production was everything, and it didn't matter how. It is only by the grace of God that I am still here. —Eberhardt

Later he did finish his apprenticeship, but it was only a short time before he left East Germany.

The communists were big on promoting sports and youth organizations. At age fifteen or sixteen Eberhardt joined the youth fire department. They had a fire truck, sort of. Instead of a bed it had only a frame and some boards.

One night the fire department was called out because two trains had collided. A passenger train loaded with young miners had been on its way up to the Uranium mine. The young men were packed in; even sitting on top and standing on the ends and on the running boards. The train collided with an oncoming freight train.

To this day, what I saw is like a nightmare. There was blood running out of the cars. We had to go in and pull out the bodies and line them up. —Eberhardt

The Russians pushed the German people to the limit. In June of 1953 there was an uprising of all kinds of workers in East Germany. Of course they had no weapons, and the Russians massacred them. The uprising did help though; because the Russians realized from this that they could only push the people only so far. After this, people were allowed to visit their close relatives in the West.

This was significant for the Loeschers, because John was stationed in West Germany at the time. They could get a visa to cross the border for a visit. Hans and Lene and their son Eberhardt all got visas and went to visit. They stayed three weeks, and then Hans and Lene had to go back, since their youngest children were still at home. Eberhardt, however, stayed in West Germany.

His brothers in America eventually talked him into coming over. He couldn't go right away, though. There was a quota, and he had to wait until his number came up. He ended up waiting for three years. While he waited, he looked for work.



From the left, Eberhardt, Lene, and Hans when they visited John in West Germany.

There wasn't much work, but he did pick up enough odd jobs to eat. He would brag about how good it was, though he was still about the poorest guy around.

After a while, he had such a strong desire to see his family in Hartenstein that he took the risk of going back, not knowing if they would let him back into the West or not. He almost stayed home, but did come back and eventually got on a boat for America. He was twenty years old.

It was the saddest day of my life—seeing the country I grew up in go off in the distance. I was sure I would never see anybody again. That was done, and I didn't know what was ahead. —Eberhardt

In America he worked at the same farm where Fred was, at first. After two years he got a job in town as a helper at a print shop. Two years after that he was drafted and went to Korea.

Looking back, it seems tough. At that time it was a fight for survival, and you didn't think about it. You did the best you could, and didn't cry about it. But it's been a good life, and I have a good wife. —Eberhardt

Sources

All information was gathered through interviews and conversations with Theodore Loescher, Waldemar Loescher, and Eberhardt Loescher. The interviews and conversations took place from November 5, 2010 to December 14, 2010. They spoke from their personal experiences as well as their own personal research into the history of their family and country. Since new details of their story would come out in later conversations, it was necessary that most of the quotations be compilations of things that were said at one time or another. These compilations were then given to the men who were interviewed for review, and were approved by them.

Endnotes

1. The Loescher family would sing the German version of this hymn on their birthdays (33 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*).
2. The Communist government in East Germany rationed each person 1 loaf of bread per month. It was very thick and bitter, because they added ground buckeyes (also known as horse chestnuts) and acorns to make the flour go farther.
3. nee Döst
4. All quotations have been compiled from interviews and conversations with these men over a period of two weeks. The quotations were then submitted to the men for review and approval.
5. The details of these bombings can be confirmed in *Der Untergang Dresdens*, written by David Irving, published first in 1963 and available in several English translations.
6. "sour grass"—the exact species is uncertain.
7. "Otter tongues"
8. Technically, it was an instrument known as a harmonium.
9. "For Me to Live is Jesus," CW 606.
10. Also known as horse chestnuts. They are very bitter.
11. Pokin' [cigarette] butts, that is very modern.
Pokin' butts, also done by fine gentlemen
A man coming down the street
Has on the bottom of his cane a nail
'Bumps'—just like that he has a butt on it!
12. "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God...Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." Though having every reason to be downcast, they found hope and strength in God and his Word.
13. The cows
14. Information taken out of a bulletin insert from Zion Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Hartenstein.
15. The German equivalent of elementary school.

A Biography of Adolph Hoenecke

With Special Emphasis on the Role He Played
in Shaping the Conservative Position of Our Synod¹

Harold E. Wicke

Adolph Hoenecke, the son of William Hoenecke and his wife Amalie, nee Liebchen, was born on the 25th of February, 1835, in Brandenburg, Germany, a town about 50 to 60 miles southwest of Berlin. His father was an inspector of hospitals by profession and was a man who was much interested in giving his children a good education. He sent all of his sons through the Gymnasium² at Brandenburg, after which Hoenecke's older brothers entered the armed forces. A word ought to be said about the religious atmosphere of the home. Hoenecke was born in the heyday of rationalism. His father was an unbeliever, and not even outwardly interested in matters pertaining to the church, nor in the least concerned about the religious upbringing of his sons. His mother is said to have believed personally, to have taught her sons prayers in their youth, but to have been completely without influence in their later religious training.

When Hoenecke finished his education at the Gymnasium of Brandenburg, he was unable to follow in the footsteps of his older brothers who had entered the army, due to his weak physical condition. For a time he toyed with the idea of becoming a flower-gardener because he dearly loved flowers—a love he kept to his old age. But a chance remark, of which we shall have something to say later, led him to decide to enter the ministry. In 1856 at the age of 21 years, he accordingly entered the University of Halle to study theology. In Halle he came under the influence of Prof. August Tholuck (1799-1877), who won him for the gospel of Christ, and by his teaching and through personal contact firmly established him in the truths of the Word of God. In 1859 at the age of 24, Hoenecke passed his examination and graduated from the university.

Tholuck wanted Hoenecke to continue his schooling in order to become a professor of theology, but Hoenecke did not have sufficient funds to do so. Nor was he able to enter into the ministry, because there was a great overproduction of theological candidates. Many had to wait seven or eight years before being assigned a parish. It was Tholuck who then procured a position for young Hoenecke as a private tutor in the home of a certain Herr von Wattenwyl in the neighborhood of Bern, Switzerland. He entered upon his duties on January 1, 1860, and stayed for two years. The climate was ideal for his health, which improved remarkably. Of still greater importance was the fact that here he met and fell in love with the young lady who later became his wife. She was Mathilde Hess, the daughter of a Reformed pastor by the name of Rudolf Hess in Hoechstetten, in the Canton of Bern. This fact, together with a number of other considerations, led him to the next step in his career.

At about this time the Berlin Mission Society had sent a letter to all of the universities, offering to send all surplus theological candidates to America to meet the urgent need for pastors among the emigrant Germans. The Prussian State Church also promised all candidates who answered this call seniority rights in the calls sent out by the State Church of Prussia. That was quite an inducement. Many candidates, among them our own Thiele, Mayerhoff, and Jaeckel,³ answered this call. So did Hoenecke. The Berlin Mission Society then designated him for the ministry in the young Wisconsin Synod. Through correspondence with Pres. John Muehlhaeuser (1804-1867) he was tentatively promised the congregation which Fachtmann, who also once travelled these parts in the Fox River Valley, had served in LaCrosse. Immediately he parted from his fiancée, promising to send for her or to return for her, entrained for Magdeburg and had himself ordained at the Cathedral in Magdeburg. In the spring of 1863 he then set out for America.

Having arrived in Milwaukee, he found that the LaCrosse congregation was no longer vacant. Instead, he was sent to Racine, but did not stay very long. The daughter of one of the prominent men in the congregation developed a crush on Hoenecke, and her father did not want a poor preacher as a son-in-law. Hoenecke, of course, was entirely innocent in this affair, perhaps not even aware of it. But it did prevent his receiving the call to Racine. Later, after he had moved to Farmington, the people of Racine found out that he had a fiancée and immediately sent him the call, for Racine was still vacant. However, Hoenecke was satisfied with the small country congregation in Farmington, of which he had become the first pastor, and returned the call. Hoenecke particularly was induced to remain at Farmington because it was close to Watertown, which at that time was already becoming a strong Lutheran center.

At this point permit me to digress from our story. The Atlantic must have been a very busy sea during the 1850s and 1860s, in fact it must have been literally covered with Germans emigrating to the United States. In 1854, nine years before Hoenecke left Germany, a young man and his wife and one year old child also decided to find their fortunes in America. Together with other relatives they settled in the region called Farmington in Jefferson County, Wisconsin. After they had established their own homes, their thoughts went to providing a place for worship and a school for their children. As a result they built a log church, which at the same time served as a school. The furnishings were very primitive. They consisted of a low altar and two rows of benches fifteen feet long without any backs. All homemade! That was in the year 1859. A teacher by the name of Kinow had been immediately responsible for gathering the Lutherans in the locality and inducing them to undertake this work. One of the founders of the congregation was John Dobberstein, and another was his brother-in-law, August Jaeck. The congregation built its simple church on land belonging to August Jaeck. Teacher Kinow served these people as well as he could, teaching their children and conducting reading services in the log church. Finally, he went further to collect and found the congregation at Fort Atkinson. It was then that Immanuel's Church at Farmington appealed to the Wis-

consin Synod for a pastor. Adolph Hoenecke was sent to them and served them for the next three years. When he came there, he was, of course, single. He boarded and roomed with the widow of August Jaeck, who had died in the meantime. Hers was also a log hut. And repeatedly, when Hoenecke would return from the church, being in deep thought he would forget to duck at the door-way and consequently bump his forehead. After two years of that he sent for his fiancée and they were married quietly in Watertown by Pastor John Bading.

The rest of Hoenecke's life will be sketched very briefly, since the details will be discussed in other portions of this paper. When synod met in Grace Church Milwaukee in June, 1863, Hoenecke was present and was accepted as a member of synod. In 1864 synod met in Manitowoc, where Koehler was pastor. It was at this meeting that Hoenecke was elected secretary of synod. During the next few years he also represented the synod at the meetings of the General Council and in discussions with Iowa and Missouri. In 1865 synod decided to publish a synodical paper, the *Ev.-lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*. Prof. Edward Mohldenke (1836-1904) of the recently opened seminary was chosen editor-in-chief. Hoenecke and Pastor Bading were appointed assistant editors. In the same meeting he was elected Seminary-Visitor together with Pastor Vorberg and Mr. August Gamm. In the following year he was elected to the Seminary Board of Trustees. Thus his talents and abilities quickly came to be recognized.

About this time things were not going so very well at the seminary. The president of the seminary, Mohldehnke, who had formerly been a traveling missionary, loved to travel, and sometimes cancelled all classes for weeks at a time. Discipline was also lax at the seminary. In its meeting on June 12, 1866, the synod sought to remedy the situation by choosing Hoenecke, who still was pastor at Farmington, as *Inspector* dean of students) of the institution and theological professor. Mohldenke, of course, resented the apparent criticism and was critical of what he saw as an unnecessary expense for the struggling synod and school. He resigned from the seminary and also left the synod. From 1866 to 1869 Hoenecke then labored quietly and diligently as inspector and professor at the synod's first seminary in Watertown. In 1868 he was one of the moving forces which brought about a mutual recognition of the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod.

In 1870 it was decided to send Wisconsin's theological students to the seminary at St. Louis, and to send Missouri's college students to Watertown. Hoenecke was destined to go to St. Louis, but doctors forbade him to accept the position because of his health.⁴ He then accepted a call to St. Matthew's Church in Milwaukee, which congregation he served from 1870 to 1890. During the last twelve years of his pastorate there, he also served as Director of the seminary, which had been reopened in 1878 in Milwaukee, first in various private residences and then in a remodeled building in Eimermann's Park. He taught particularly courses in homiletics and in dogmatics. In 1890 he was called to be the fulltime president of the seminary and subsequently resigned from his pastorate at St. Matthew's. The seminary was moved to Wauwatosa in 1893. Under his direction the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, the theological journal of the synod, began publication in 1904. In

the same year on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the re-opening of our seminary, Northwestern College granted him and Prof. Franz Pieper of St. Louis the title of Doctor of Theology. Five years later, on January 3, 1908, this gifted and consecrated teacher of our church, entered his eternal home at an age of 72 years, 10 months, and 8 days. His *Ev. Luth. Dogmatic* was published posthumously by his sons. This concludes his life. In the rest of this paper we now wish to take up some special points, dealing with his influence in shaping the conservative position of our synod.

How God Made Hoenecke a Theologian Faithful to Scripture

It is well-nigh miraculous that Hoenecke even became a pastor. He had grown up in a home that was indifferent toward matters of faith. He himself was inclined to take up horticulture as a profession. That is what he was considering when, after his graduation from the Gymnasium at Brandenburg, he happened to be visiting at the home of the music teacher of the Gymnasium, a certain Taeglichbeck, who himself was an out and out rationalist and unbeliever. A neighboring pastor, by the name of Soergel, who happened to be a classmate of Taeglichbeck, was also visiting there. He was a man of strong and healthy physique. In the course of the conversation Taeglichbeck slapped Pastor Soergel on the knee and jokingly said to Hoenecke, who was rather frail and sickly, "See Adolph! Become a pastor and you will have it good." The remark took root, and after Hoenecke had visited Soergel's parsonage a few times, he decided for the ministry. That was God's doing, for there was no spiritual inclination on Hoenecke's part to take up the sacred study of theology.

Again, it was God's providence that he chose Halle University and thus came under the influence of Prof. August Tholuck. Tholuck has been criticized as a pietist and a unionist. The charges are somewhat unfair. True, he was a member of the Prussian State Church, which was made up of Lutherans and Reformed. But in his teachings he stood for Lutheran doctrine and not Reformed doctrine, although perhaps not as clearly as he might have.⁵ A pietist he was not. In that day of rationalism everyone who wanted to remain true to the Word of God was immediately maligned as a pietist. Tholuck was a sincere Christian, who gathered his students about him and practised real *Seelsorge*⁶ upon them. It was thus that Hoenecke by God's grace came to a living and active faith in the Lord Jesus. It is sad that this beautiful friendship was later broken up because of a misunderstanding. Tholuck led Hoenecke into the Scripture and into the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians Quenstedt and Calov. Thus the Lord prepared this man for his life's work here in the Wisconsin Synod.

Again, his two-year stay in Switzerland was of the greatest importance. There he became personally acquainted with Reformed, Calvinistic theology. His fiancée was the daughter of a Reformed pastor in Hoechstetten. It was only natural that these two men discussed the various doctrines. At the same time Hoenecke was

spending his leisure time studying the Lutheran dogmaticians, to whom he had been directed by Tholuck. He recognized that Lutheran doctrine was based on the Scripture and Reformed theology on reason. Thus it came, that when his two years in Switzerland were over, he had no desire to enter the State Church of Prussia, which was a union of Lutheran and Reformed. This was also one of the motives that caused him to follow the call of the Berlin Mission Society to preach in the Lutheran Church in America. Perhaps these points were not quite as clear to his mind as we have represented them, but the basic thoughts were there. God the Holy Spirit had been working in his heart through the words of Scripture. When later in Wisconsin he faced these very same problems, Hoenecke's answer was ready. It was God who made him a theologian faithful to the Scriptures.

His Position of Influence in the Wisconsin Synod

Strange as it may seem, Hoenecke made no inquiries as to our confessional stand when he applied for a position in the Wisconsin Synod. Not knowing the historical and doctrinal background of the various synods in the United States, he was at times also, particularly at first, too ready to take things at their face value. However, experience changed that—plus good friends like John Bading (1824-1813) and Philip Koehler (1828-1895) In its early days the Wisconsin Synod was not the staunch Lutheran body that it is today. The Wisconsin Synod was a child of the German Missionary Societies. These were not truly Lutheran. The men they sent out were for the most part imbued with a unionistic spirit, their Lutheranism being of a very limited kind. However, because they had been told that Lutheran preaching stood more of a show among the Germans in the Midwest than Reformed theology, they chose to be Lutherans. It was only gradually that they became really true Lutherans. Muehlhaeuser himself, the first president of the synod, a man of rather meager theological training, but highly gifted in other ways, never really understood the fundamental differences between Lutheranism and Reformed theology. This becomes clear when we consider that in 1850 the name chosen for the synod was *Das Deutsche Evangelische Ministerium von Wisconsin*. Nor were these people clear in the doctrine of the ministry they seemingly knew nothing of the priesthood of all believers and of the rights of a Christian congregation, as is exemplified by their practice of licensing preachers and on occasion simply deposing pastors from their pastorate without a single word of consultation with the congregation. Many of the early pastors also were unionists, who could see no wrong in worshiping with and cooperating with Christians of all other denominations. The Prussian State Church Union Catechism was also in use in many of the congregations. Such was the Lutheranism of the early Wisconsin Synod. A thorough housecleaning was needed if we wanted to be truly Lutheran.

However, we must not think that no steps had been taken in that direction before Hoenecke became a member of the synod. The matter had become a most definite issue by the time Hoenecke was admitted as member of the synod. Most

outspoken against all unionism were Pastors John Bading and Pastor Philip Koehler. When Bading arrived in 1853, he insisted that he be held to the Lutheran Confessions in his ordination vow, something which had been sorely neglected heretofore, though required in the constitution. Koehler arrived in 1854. About 1855 or 1856 these men, together with J.J.E. Sauer, Jakob Conrad, Gottlieb Reim and a few others, organized the Northwestern Conference of the synod and this conference became the center of a true Lutheranism in opposition to the mild, indifferent Lutheranism of the synod's president, John Muehlhaeuser. Repeatedly in the years to come, this conference sent letters and petitions to the synod for a more determined stand against all unionism and for strict discipline among the synod's pastors. This tendency gained the upper hand when Bading was elected president of the synod in 1860. He made it the aim of his presidency to fight unionism and to establish a seminary for the training of the synod's pastors.

Such was the state of affairs when Hoenecke joined the synod. He immediately recognized in these men kindred spirits. Vastly their superior in theological, truly Lutheran training and knowledge, they were his superior in dealing with practical situations. "Hoenecke poured the bullets, and Bading and Koehler shot them," August Pieper wrote in the *Quartalschrift* of 1935. These men valued his deep insight into and knowledge of what was Lutheran and what was biblical, and it is undoubtedly due to them that Hoenecke was thrust into the foreground and given the opportunity to become the teacher of the synod. Thus Hoenecke soon replaced Mohldenke as editor of the *Gemeinde-Blatt* and professor of theology at the seminary. In the one he taught the rank and file of the synod the fundamentals of true Lutheranism and in the other he taught and molded the synod's future pastors. True, he was not alone in doing this, but he was the guiding spirit. We cannot thank God enough for placing this man in such a responsible position.

His work in the *Gemeinde-Blatt* may well serve as a guide for our church papers today. Beginning with number 2, volume 1, Hoenecke wrote a series of discussions on the confession of the Lutheran Church, discussing all the doctrines in great detail. After finishing this series he ever continued to present other doctrinal articles. In the Forward to volume 4 he wrote the following words, which are well worth remembering: "Doctrinal articles should be the main thing in our paper; they should be that which is desired and wished for most by all readers. Without clear, thorough teaching there can be no upbuilding, at least not of the right kind; a mere rousing of the feelings, touching of the heart, agitation of the emotions is no upbuilding; so-called edifying articles, that have only that as aim and nothing else, do not edify, do not strengthen faith. If teaching doctrine alone can build, then doctrinal articles are necessary." It is in that way that Hoenecke quietly, but surely, built up a constituency in the synod that was well-grounded in the doctrines of the Lutheran faith. That is why our fathers, even though they were laymen, could intelligently and clearly discuss the doctrines of Holy Writ. It was thus that Hoenecke helped to bring our synod on the right paths, the paths on which the Word of God is a light unto our feet. He was the synod's teacher; his pupils were our teachers; may his spirit abide with us in a thousand generations.

His Influence in the Synod's Choice of Synodical Connections

But we would go over to another topic, namely, Hoenecke's influence in the synod's choice of synodical connections. Muehlhaeuser, before coming to Wisconsin, had spent a number of years in New York. There he was ordained in 1837 and immediately joined the New York Ministerium, which was a member of the General Synod,⁷ which through the years became progressively more unionistic. That is, however, where Muehlhaeuser's heart lay and he kept up friendly relations with that body, even after organizing the Wisconsin Synod. In its early days the synod also received some financial help from the Pennsylvania Synod, as also some pastors. Such was the fellowship fostered by the synod's early pastors.

But matters began to ferment in the General Synod in the late 1850s and early 1860s. The deadly disease of unionism and indifferentism was exposed in 1857 when the unlutheran Melancthon Synod was taken up as a member. The split came in 1864. Through the years a group in the Synod of Pennsylvania had come to a clearer understanding of and love for Lutheran doctrine, that is, biblical doctrine. In that year (1864) the totally rationalistic Frankean Synod applied for membership in the General Synod, which was then in session at York, Pennsylvania. The Synod of Pennsylvania protested, but the indifferent majority voted to accept the Frankean Synod. The Synod of Pennsylvania then opened its own seminary at Philadelphia and in 1866 left the General Synod, together with the Iowa Synod and a few others. Subsequently, the Pennsylvania Synod sent a circular letter to all Lutheran synods, which adopted the Augsburg Confession as their confessional statement, and called for a meeting of these synods at Reading, Pennsylvania, in December of 1866. Our synod sent President Streissguth (Bading was in Europe) and Professor Martin as delegates to this meeting. At this meeting the representatives of sixteen synods decided on a constitution and determined to present it for approval to their respective synods and then to report back at Ft. Wayne, Indiana, on November 20, 1867, to found "The General Council of the Ev. Lutheran Church of North America."⁸ The question now before the synod was: Shall Wisconsin join this new federation or stay out? Sentiment in the synod was in favor of joining this group. Even Hoenecke was ready to join, undoubtedly because he had not been personally present at Reading and was not sufficiently acquainted with the causes that had brought about the exodus from the General Synod. But God's thoughts were higher thoughts.

The synod met again in St. John's Church, Milwaukee, from the 20th to the 27th of June, 1867. For some years already feelers had been sent out by the Iowa Synod for union with Wisconsin. Ten representatives of the Iowa Synod appeared at this meeting and were welcomed with open arms, among them the brothers Fritschel.⁹ Soon, however, it became apparent that they had come to make propaganda for their peculiar confessional stand and for their doctrine of open questions.¹⁰ They considered the Lutheran Confessions merely historical documents showing what solution the theologians of the Reformation had found for the problems facing them and considered them merely guides to be used in meeting the

problems of today. They also asked tolerance for their view concerning open questions, namely, that though the synod might not stand so officially, the individual members of the synod might agree to differ on the doctrines concerning the divine necessity of Sunday observance, the pope as Antichrist, the millennium, the general conversion of the Jews, and others. The synod would have fallen for their arguments, had it not been for the firm position taken by Hoenecke and a number of other pastors in these matters. Hoenecke demonstrated on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions that true Christians could not tolerate such a situation. That was really the deciding factor in keeping us from joining Iowa and remaining in the General Council, although nothing was said concerning that officially. The synod then chose Bading, Muehlhaeuser, and Prof. Martin as representatives to represent it at Ft. Wayne. However, Muehlhaeuser died in the meantime and Hoenecke was chosen in his place. Hoenecke played a rather minor role at Ft. Wayne but did become fully aware of the confessional character of all the other synods, which helped him fight for the truth in his own body later. The Ohio Synod, which was well acquainted with the false doctrines and practices of the various Lutheran synods, brought the famous "Four Points" up for discussion at this meeting, namely, the question of lodge membership, altar fellowship with non-Lutherans, pulpit fellowship with the same, and chiliasm. The gathering did not give a clear-cut decision on these points and resolved to take them up at a later time. Ohio and Iowa then declared that they could not as yet consider themselves members of the body. Our synod declared itself a member, but stated that it would have to present the action (rather, non-action) of the body to its own group for discussion and action.

The next meeting of the synod took place in Racine in 1868. The main point of business was the report of the delegates to Ft. Wayne and all discussion centered about the four points before mentioned. After an intense struggle, the Bible truth being championed by Hoenecke against Pastors Vorgerg, Kittel, Lucas, Professor Martin and others, the synod decided "that synod together with the entire orthodox Lutheran Church reject all and every altar- and pulpit-fellowship with false and heterodox churches as a doctrine and practice contrary to Lutheran teaching." That cost the synod the membership of Pastors Vorberg and Kittel and Professor Martin, but the air was cleared of unionism once and for all. Bading and Hoenecke were chosen as delegates to Pittsburg, and witnessed the fact that the General Council would take no definitive stand in regard to the four points. At the synod convention in Helenville, Wisconsin, in 1869, the synod officially broke with the General Council and declined to enter upon further discussions with Iowa.

In the meantime discussions had been going on between Wisconsin and Missouri. For a long time Missouri had refused to recognize us as true Lutherans, but gradually things had changed. It became evident that there were no longer any doctrinal differences of any kind separating the two synods, and it was plain to both that there had been lapses on both sides when it came to practice. Hoenecke particularly can be credited with bringing the two synods together, since in his polemics he avoided anything and everything personal. This did much to pour oil

on the riled waters. Full agreement was finally reached on October 22, 1868 and the official statement was signed by Walther, Brauer, Lochner, Sievers, and Strassen for Missouri and by Bading, Hoenecke, Koehler, Dammann, and Gausewitz for Wisconsin. This was to be lasting peace, which even weathered the tribulations of the Predestination Controversy, in which Hoenecke again valiantly championed Walther's doctrine as Bible doctrine and kept the two synods together, in spite of the fact that there were some in our own midst who were ready to agree with Iowa. This agreement with Missouri led to the formation of the Synodical Conference¹¹ in 1872, at which Hoenecke was present.

Before we leave this topic we must, however dispose of another matter that was really at the bottom of all our difficulties. At the bottom of the differences that disturbed the relation between members of the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod in the early years of these two church bodies was the suspicion that Wisconsin had unionistic leanings (as indeed it had), because it accepted help from the unionistic mission societies in Germany. Wisconsin had accepted their help with genuine gratitude. This feeling of gratitude for a long time prevented the synod from taking a clear-cut stand on the matter of unionism. However, as we saw, the decisive step was taken in 1867. For some time already the mission societies had suspected that our Lutheranism was no longer the mild Lutheranism of the German State Church, but had changed into that which they despicably called *Alt-Lutherisch*.¹² Not long after our 1867 Synod meeting the Berlin Missionary Society in an open announcement cut all its ties with our Synod, accused us of dishonesty and ingratitude, and denied us all further support. In his presidential address in 1868 Bading conceded that in the past the synod had vacillated between its love for the Lutheran Confessions on the one hand and the feeling of gratitude towards the unionistic mission societies on the other hand, which had given financial aid and sent workers. As a result the synod had appeared in a light that neither friend nor foe could understand. The time had come, he declared, to make an end to this indecision. With that he brought up the matter of membership in the General Council. In this matter, as we have seen, Hoenecke stepped into the foreground and on the basis of God's Word convinced the members of the synod to reject all and every form of unionism once and for all. The friendship of the German mission societies was sacrificed, but God's Word was upheld. The credit under God belongs to Adolph Hoenecke, the son of an indifferent home, the father of a conservative synod, the product of God's grace.

Endnotes

1. This brief biography of Adolph Hoenecke by the late Pastor Harold Wicke was found in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary essay files and is presented to the readers of the *WELS Historical Institute Journal* in honor of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the seminary. Hoenecke served as the second president of the seminary and was responsible for the training of two generations of Wisconsin Synod pastors. There is no date on this essay but it seems to have

been written about 1950. Wicke was able to conduct interviews with some who as children had been students of Hoenecke when he was a pastor in Farmington. Wicke writes, "One of the members of the last class Hoenecke confirmed in Farmington, a class of eight girls and four boys, was Herman Dobberstein, the little lad who came across the ocean with his parents at the age of one, and who is now the oldest member of the Hortonville congregation, 96 this coming June. Mrs. Jaeck also was the aunt of the next oldest member of Hortonville, Mr. Robert Behrend, who will be 93 this year and was acquainted with Hoenecke during his first years in Watertown. She was also the aunt of two aged sisters, members of our congregation, who are 85 and 80 years old at present. It was a pleasure to get these people together and to hear them give these all-too-human sidelights on that great man Hoenecke. He, who later taught our Wisconsin Synod the Gospel of Jesus, had in Farmington taught little boys and girls Luther's Catechism, German reading, German writing, and German arithmetic."

2. A German Gymnasium is similar to American preparatory schools which have a strong academic curriculum intended to prepare high school age students for entrance into the university.
3. Gottlieb Thiele (1834-1919) taught at the Wisconsin Synod's seminary 1887-1900. Ernest Mayerhoff's (1834-1925) son was one of the original three Wisconsin Synod missionaries to the Apaches. Theodor Jaeckel (1829-1906) eventually served as pastor of Grace congregation in downtown Milwaukee and for many years as treasurer of the Wisconsin Synod.
4. Ed. – The source of this information cannot be determined but this may well have been the stated reason for Hoenecke's declining the call to St. Louis.
5. Tholuck seems to have made some concessions to the negative critics and is sometimes called a mediating theologian.
6. The care of souls, the work of a pastor.
7. The General Synod was founded in 1820 as a federation to promote and coordinate work among various Lutheran synods in America. It was dominated by non-confessional or liberal Lutherans.
8. The General Council was founded as a confessional reaction to the General Synod. The General Council however did not put its confessional stance into practice. It never was able to come to grips with the scriptural practice of church fellowship. Eventually liberalism dominated.
9. Sigmund (1833-1900) and Gottfried (1836-1889) Fritschel were early theological leaders in the Iowa Synod.
10. Most confessional Lutherans teach that open questions are questions whose answers cannot be determined from Scripture. The Iowa Synod, however, taught that open questions are certain doctrines of Scripture concerning which Lutherans may disagree and yet remain in fellowship with each other.
11. The Synodical Conference was founded because of the lack of Lutheran confessionalism in the General Synod and the failure of the General Council to come to suitable answers on the "four points" and to put its confession into practice.

The Synodical Conference attempted to promote true confessionalism among Lutherans in America and became the leading voice of confessional Lutheranism in America for nearly 100 years. It carried out joint home and world mission work and educational endeavors.

12. "Old Lutherans" took the Lutheran Confessions seriously, practiced the scriptural doctrine of church fellowship, and refused to go along with the Prussian Union.

Looking Back

25 years ago – 1988

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA] is formed by the merger of the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and the Associations of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (Seminec).
- The WELS Board for Parish Education reports that for the first time in many years no new elementary schools were opened during the past school year and none are projected to be opened during the next school year. Four schools were closed during the past year and two were would be closed at the end of the 1987-88 school year.
- The WELS Board for Home Missions reports that during the last biennium it granted 19 requests for manpower, 16 new fields were opened, 15 congregations and exploratory efforts were granted mission status, and 27 missions reached self-support. The report also notes that 250 congregations were receiving some sort of financial support from the synod.
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary celebrates the 125th anniversary of its founding with a convocation on April 22 under the theme, "The Seminary's Unchanging Foundation in a Changing World." Three essays are presented, one on each of the Reformation *solas*: *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Scriptura*, and *Sola Fide*. A jubilee service is held on Sunday, April 24.

50 years ago – 1963

- The WELS and ELS withdraw from the Synodical Conference.
- The Lutheran Free Church joins the ALC. Not wishing to join with the ALC, several former LFC churches form the Lutheran Free Church (not merged) but are forced by a court order to change the name. They become The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations and have since received several congregations leaving ELCA.
- The Wisconsin Synod reports that six new elementary schools were opened during the past biennium.
- The Wisconsin Synod in convention authorizes Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to call an 8th professor and to build of a new professorage.
- The 100th anniversary of the founding of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is celebrated with the dedication of new additions to the dormitory on Sunday, August 11, while the synod is in convention in Milwaukee.

75 years ago – 1938

- The Missouri Synod in convention resolves that its 1932 doctrinal statement, the *Brief Statement*, "together with the Declaration of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report . . . be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship."
- Later that summer the American Lutheran Church adopts the following statement at its Sandusky Convention: "We are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines [doctrines revealed in Scripture but not absolutely necessary for saving faith]." It also states its unwillingness to terminate its fellowship in the American Lutheran Conference, a federation that includes Scandinavian Lutheran synods with whom the Missouri Synod is not in fellowship.

100 years ago – 1913

- John Schaller publishes his *Pastorale Praxis*, a "definitive work on Pastoral Theology that (breathes) fresh evangelical spirit."
- Pastor John Bading, longtime president of the Wisconsin Synod and one of the prime movers behind Wisconsin becoming a truly confessional Lutheran synod, dies.
- A *Laienbewegung* (lay movement) is organized to bring about the union of Wisconsin and Missouri Synod congregations in the state of Wisconsin.
- The Federation (Joint Synod) of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States meeting in Green Bay, August 20-26, adopts the following resolution:
 1. That the now existing synods unite to form one synod by transferring all rights to the Joint Synod, which shall then divide itself into districts.
 2. We recommend that this Joint Synod be divided into geographical districts and that the now existing synodical boundaries need not be considered in the new division.
 3. All institutions, as well as all other property of the individual synods, shall be transferred to the Joint Synod.
 4. We hold that each synod is responsible for its present indebtedness and should liquidate he same.

This resolution results in the 1917 amalgamation of the Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska synods into the Wisconsin Synod as we know it today.

125 years ago – 1888

- The Michigan Synod withdraws from the General Council, paving the way for fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod, Minnesota Synod and the Synodical Conference. At the time the Michigan Synod numbers 31 pastors, 35 schools, and 1,147 pupils.
- Prof. J.P. Koehler is called to teach at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin.

150 years ago – 1863

- Adolph Hoenecke arrives in America and takes charge of the congregation at Farmington, near Watertown, Wisconsin.
- The 13th annual convention of the Wisconsin Synod authorizes the opening of a seminary that fall. After a lengthy debate, the synod votes to locate the seminary in Watertown rather than Milwaukee. Cost was a factor, as well as “the harmful influences to which students are exposed in larger commercial centers like Milwaukee.”
- The Rev. Edward Moldehnke, the synod’s *Reiseprediger* (traveling missionary) is appointed the first professor at the seminary.
- The convention resolves to send President John Bading to Germany to solicit help for the seminary project. Vice-president Gottlieb Reim is to serve as acting president during Bading’s absence.
- Pastor C.F. Heyer, president of the Minnesota Synod, addresses the Wisconsin Synod convention in the hope that Wisconsin and Minnesota might establish closer ties. Wisconsin contacts the Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio synods in an effort to establish closer ties.

175 years ago – 1838

- Five ships led by Martin Stephan leave Germany for America. The *Copernicus* is the first ship to leave. During the course of the month, the *Amalia*, *Johann Georg*, *Republik* and *Olbers* follow. C.F.W. Walther arrives at the dock too late to sail aboard the *Amalia* and has to board the *Johann Georg*. In December the *Amalia* and her fifty passengers are lost at sea.

200 years ago -- 1813

- Franz Delitsch (1813-1890) is born. As a student at Leipzig University he was an acquaintance of C.F.W. Walther and other early leaders of the Missouri Synod.

He served as a professor at Rostock, Erlangen, and Leipzig. He was concerned about the Christian mission to the Jews and also the protection of the Jews from persecution. He translated the New Testament into Hebrew and in 1886 founded the *Institutum Judaicum*, a seminary for training candidates of theology for Jewish missions. He had a strong influence on Old Testament studies in England and North America. Today he is probably best known in America for the commentary on the entire Old Testament that he wrote with Johann Keil. This commentary series was quickly translated into English and remains in print to this day. Unfortunately toward the end of his life Delitsch accepted some of the results of the historical-critical approach to the Scriptures. Although claiming to be a confessional Lutheran, he was opposed “to fencing off theology with the Formula of Concord.”

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.

The board members are: Prof. Robert Bock, president; Daniel Nommensen, vice-president; Naomi Plocher, secretary; Duane Kuehl, treasurer; Prof. Joel Pless, Steven Miller, Prof. James Korthals, Rev. Joel Leyrer, Prof. Aaron Palmer, Rev. David Dolan, Mr. Kenneth Artlip, and Rev. Raymond Schumacher. Advisory members are: Prof. John Hartwig, Prof. John M. Brenner, and Charlotte Sampe, designer and museum curator.

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